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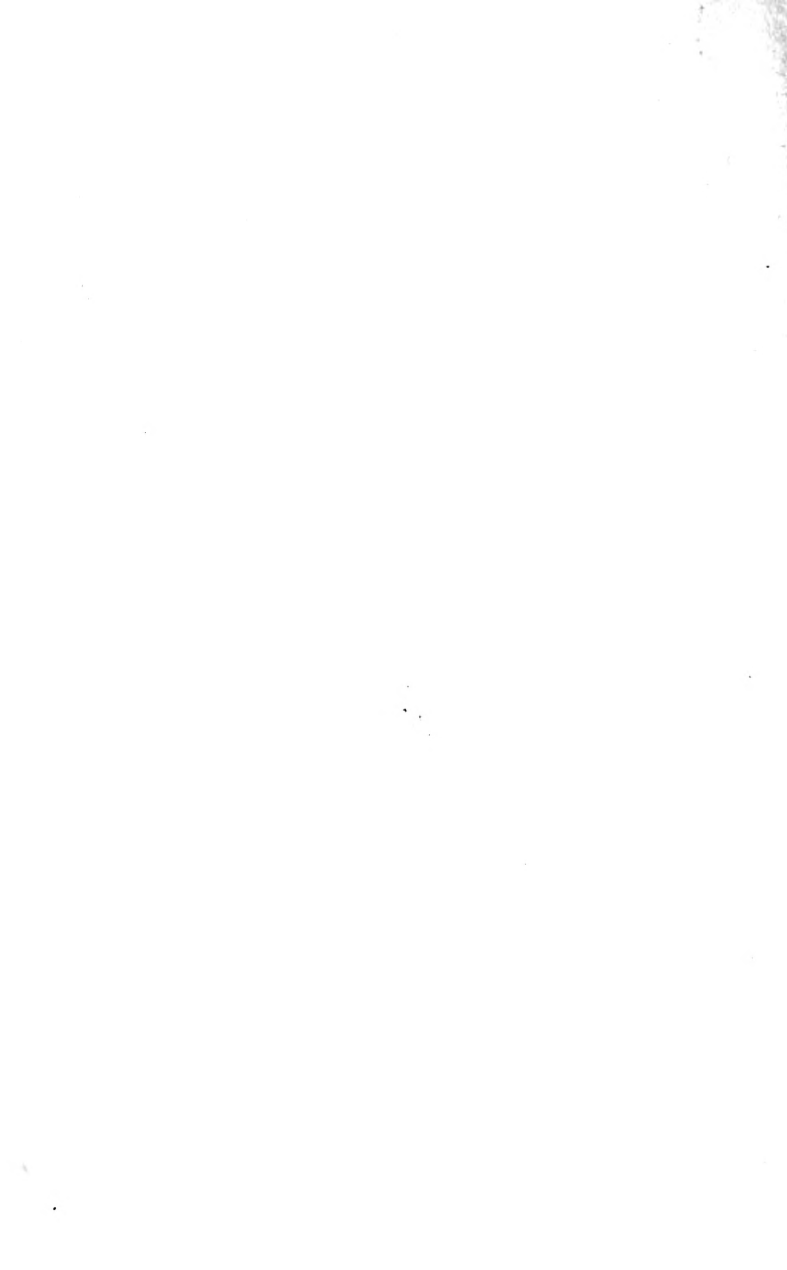
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ROSE, BLANCHE,

AND

VIOLET.

BY

G. H. LEWES, Esq.

AUTHOR OF "RANTHORPE,"

"A BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY," ETC. ETC.

Il n'y a point de vertu proprement dite, sans victoire sur nous-mêmes, et tout ce qui ne nous coûte rien, ne vaut rien.

DE MAISTRE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

1848.

London :
Printed by STEWART and MURRAY,
Old Bailey.

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ROSE, BLANCHE, AND VIOLET.

BOOK II.

(Continued.)

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ELOPEMENT DELAYED.

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds
Towards Phœbus' mansion ; such a waggoner
As phæton would whip you to the west.
Come, gentle night ; come, loving black browed night
Give me my Romeo.

Romeo and Juliet.

CAPTAIN HEATH and the postilion were not the only persons impatient at the unexpected delay. Cecil leaning against a tree, watching with anxious eyes the window of Blanche's bed-room for the signal, and counting the weary minutes, as they dragged with immea-

surable tediousness through their course of sixty seconds, began at length to suppose that she would never come.

Nor was the unhappy Blanche herself the least impatient of the four. The whole mystery of the delay was the presence of Violet in her room. She had repeatedly announced her intention of going to bed, but Violet gave no signs of retiring, and their conversation continued.

It more than once occurred to her to place Violet in her confidence, but certain misgivings restrained her. The fact is, Blanche had been uneasy at Cecil's attentions to Violet, during the first period of their acquaintance with him; an uneasiness which she now understood to have been jealousy; and naturally felt reluctant to speak of her engagement to one who had almost been her sister's lover.

It happened that Cecil's name came up during their conversation, and Violet turning her large eyes upon her sister's face, said,—

“Shall I tell you my suspicion, Blanche? Cecil Chamberlayne is fast falling in love with you: you colour; you know it then? perhaps return it? Oh, for God's sake tell me that you do not return it!”

"Why should I not?" replied Blanche, greatly hurt.

"My poor Blanche!" said Violet, tenderly kissing her, "I have hurt you, but it is with a surgeon's knife, which inflicts pain to save pain. If it is not too late—if you are only at the brink of the abyss, not *in* it—let me implore you to draw back, and to examine your situation calmly. Oh! do not waste your heart on such a man."

There was an earnestness in her manner which only made her language more galling, and Blanche somewhat pettishly replied,—

"You did not *always* think so. At one time *you* were near *wasting* your heart, as you call it, upon him."

"I was," gravely replied Violet, "and a fortunate accident opened my eyes in time. You, who seemed to have watched me so closely, may have noticed that for some time I have ceased to encourage his attentions."

"Since he has ceased to pay them," retorted Blanche.

Violet smiled a scornful smile.

Neither spoke for a few minutes.

"I have a great mind to ascend the ladder," said the impatient Cecil to himself, and see if

it is only womanly weakness which detains her."

"Can they have been detected?" Captain Heath asked himself for the twentieth time.

"Blanche," said Violet at last, "you greatly misunderstand me; but what is worse, you greatly misunderstand *him*. Listen!"

She then narrated the whole of her episode with Cecil: her first yearnings towards him—her interest, and almost love; then the scene at the Grange; his conduct in the affair with the bull; she recalled to Blanche the mutual coldness which must have been observed until after Cecil's confession respecting his cowardice, which so far cleared him in her eyes, that she was amiable to him for the rest of the evening; she then told her of reflections made that night when alone, and the result to which she had arrived, and concluded by saying:—

"I am most willing to admit his fascinating manners, his varied accomplishments, and some good qualities; but he is weak, selfish, and capricious. He is not a proper husband for you, the more so as he is poor, and has not the character which will enable him to battle with the world. Rich, he would not make you a good husband; poor, he will be a curse to

you, and throw the blame of his misery upon you."

Blanche remained perfectly quiet during this dissection of her lover's character, and not a change in her countenance betrayed that it had in the least affected her. Nor had it. Perfectly incredulous, she listened to her sister, seeing only the distortion of prejudice in her language.

"Have you finished, Violet?" she quietly asked.

"I have."

"Then give me a night to consider."

"Yes, consider it calmly; think of the man on whom you are about to bestow your affections, and ask yourself seriously, Is he the man I ought to choose? — Good-night, Blanche!"

"Good - night. God bless you!" said Blanche, hugging her fervently, which Violet attributed to the emotion excited by their conversation, but which really was the embrace of parting.

A few minutes afterwards, Blanche was descending the ladder, a small packet in her hand, and was received in the arms of her impatient lover.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW THEY WENT TO LONDON.

How the old post-chaise rattled merrily along the hard road, as if conscious of the precious burden which it bore ! There was no moon : the sky was overcast. Lights glimmered from the windows of distant houses at rare intervals ; and the watch-dog's lonely bark was occasionally heard—a sort of mournful sound, which told how deep the night had gone.

With what wild passion—with what inextinguishable delight the lovers pressed close to each other, in that rumbling chaise ! The sense of peril and of escape was mixed with the indescribable rapture of two beings conscious that all barriers are borne down, and that they at length belong to each other.

Away ! away ! from home, with its restraints,

its perils, and its doubts—far into the wide world of love and hope!—from father, sisters, friends—from luxuries and comforts, cheaply held by those who know not the reverse—to the protecting bosom of a husband, dearer than all the world beside; and with him to begin the battle of life, which love will make an everlasting triumph!

Away goes the rumbling chaise! too slowly for its inmates, whose impatience needs wings; too swiftly for the wretched man, who sits behind, communing with his own bitter thoughts.

What a slight partition divided the delirious lovers from the unhappy wretch who rode behind them—a partition which divided the joys of paradise from the pangs of purgatory. The captain had not only to endure the misery of unhappy love, but also the, to him, horrible torture of believing the girl he loved had given herself up to a villain, who did not intend to marry her.

“If I *do* force him to marry her,” he said, “what happiness can she expect from such a scoundrel? Her character will be saved; but her heart will be broken . . . If he refuses . . . if I shoot him . . . she will hate me . . . will

not less revere his memory . . . and will have lost her name !”

And merrily the chaise rattled on.

It reached London at last. There the captain got down, and, hailing a cab, bade the driver follow the post-chaise, at a slight distance. It stopped at an hotel. They alighted, and went in.

The captain followed them to the hotel. His first act was to write this letter to Meredith Vyner.

(Don't read this aloud.)

“MY DEAR VYNER,

“Before this reaches you, the flight of your daughter with Chamberlayne will have been known to you. Make yourself as easy as possible under the deplorable calamity; for I am in the same hotel with them, and will see them duly married.

“You will be astonished to hear me talk of their marriage, and of my forwarding it, instead of taking every step to prevent it. But, when I tell you that marriage is now *imperative*—that it is, alas! what we must all now eagerly desire—my conduct will be intelligible. Put your perfect trust in me. You know my affec-

tion for your children, and my regard for the honour of the family."

Great, indeed, was the consternation at the Hall, on the morning when the flight was discovered. At first it was imagined Blanche had gone off with Captain Heath; but when Cecil's absence was also discovered, the real state of the case was acknowledged. But the captain's absence still remained a mystery. That he should be implicated in the elopement, seemed impossible. His known dislike to Cecil, and his great regard for the whole family, contradicted such a suspicion. Yet wherefore was he not forthcoming?

This threw such a mystery over the whole affair, they knew not what conclusion to form; some doubts began to arise as to whether it really was an elopement. Such matters were not usually managed by three persons. And yet the moonlight ramble by the three on the preceding evening did not that look as if there were some understanding between them?

To this Rose objected, that as they had been willing to accept of her company, it was evident there could have been nothing in it beyond a mere ramble.

It was observable that the one who sug-

gested and most warmly maintained the probability of there being no elopement in the case, but only perhaps some bit of fun, was Mrs. Meredith Vyner, who absolutely dissuaded her husband from taking any steps towards pursuing the fugitives by this reasoning:—

“Either they have eloped, or they are executing some joke. I incline to the latter; but even admitting the former, you know dear, — it is perfectly useless your following them, until you know what route they have taken, and as yet we have got no clue whatever. While you are hurrying to Gretna, they may be quietly housed in London, and so you have all the bother and agitation for nothing.”

Like all indolent men, Vyner was glad to have an excuse for sitting still and doing nothing. But what was Mrs. Vyner’s motive for dissuading him? Simply this: she believed in the elopement, and was delighted at it. Not only was there one daughter “off her hands”—one rival the less—but by the act of setting her father’s consent at defiance, gave him the power of refusing to give any dowry, or even a trousseau, with something like an

excuse for so doing. Mrs. Vyner had already run her husband too deeply into debt, not to keep a sharp eye on any means of economy that did not affect her comforts or caprices; and money spent upon "her dear girls," was always considered worse than lost.

On the arrival of Captain Heath's letter, all the mystery was revealed; and great was the talk it occasioned!

CHAPTER XXIII.

CECIL'S JEALOUSY.

A husband's jealousy, which cunning men would pass upon their wives for a compliment, is the worst can be made them ; for indeed it is a compliment to their beauty, but an affront to their honour.

WYCHERLEY: *The Gentleman Dancing Master.*

THE captain had just sealed his letter when he saw Cecil leave the hotel alone. He determined to profit by the opportunity, and seek Blanche. He found her writing.

As she recognised him, she gave a low scream, and then springing up, exclaimed :—

“Is my father with you? Oh! intercede for us. Gain his consent.”

“I am alone, Blanche.”

“Alone?”

“I came with you from Wytton. The same

carriage brought us both ; you rode inside, and I behind."

"What! is what! are you going to?"

"To watch over you, dear Blanche, as a brother would. To *force* him to marry you."

"*Force!* why, what do you mean? Cecil is but this instant gone for the license."

"Are you *sure* of that?"

"Sure? *He* said so ; and shall I doubt his word?"

"Why then did he bring you here? Why did he not take you to Gretna?"

"Because he feared we might be pursued, and they would be sure to follow that route."

"Hm! Yes, it is possible. And *till* you are married?"

"I am to stay with an old lady—a relation of his. He will prepare her to receive me this morning."

He sighed. So strange is human nature, that the idea of Cecil behaving delicately and honourably in the transaction, was at first a disappointment and an additional grief to him! He could not bear to think his rival less contemptible than he had held him to be, nor could he with pleasure find that his own ser-

vices were *not* needed. Blanche wanted no protector. Nevertheless, partly out of a lingering suspicion that all would not go on so smoothly as it promised, and partly from the very want he felt to consider himself of some use to his beloved Blanche, he refused entirely to credit her statement of Cecil's intentions, and declared that he would remain to watch.

"At any rate, allow me to give you away," he said, "I shall then be sure that all is right. Can you refuse me?"

She held out her hand to him by way of answer. He raised it respectfully to his lips, gazed sorrowfully at her, and withdrew.

When Cecil returned, and learned from her that the captain was in the same hotel, that he had seen Blanche, and that she had consented to his giving her away, he stormed with rage.

"Heath again! Is the viper always to be in my path, and imagine I shall not crush him at last? What is the meaning of his thrusting himself between us?" he asked her, with great fierceness. "What the devil is at the bottom of it? What makes him so anxious to have you married? I am a beggar, and he knows it; yet first one thing, then the other, he has nothing but schemes to make me marry you.

Wanted me to be a quill-driver, that I might be rich enough to marry. Marry, marry, marry! By God! there is something in it which I will discover."

"Cecil, dearest Cecil, you terrify me!"

He paced angrily up and down the room, without attending to her. A horrible suspicion had taken possession of his mind: he thought that Captain Heath had not only been her lover, but that his passion had been returned, and that it was to conceal the consequences of their guilty love that a marriage with any one seemed so desirable.

"I see it all," he said to himself, as he strode about the room; "they have selected me as their gull. It is a collusion. From whom, but from her, should he have known we had taken that moonlight stroll in the shrubbery? Why should he take upon himself the office of sentinel? Why offer me a situation? Why follow us up to town? How should he know we were to elope? Why should he, in God's name, be anxious to have her married, when it is quite clear he loves her, or has loved her, himself? He owned it last night—owned that he loved her! I do believe, when he carried off the ladder, he knew I was in the room, and

adopted that mode of making me irretrievably commit myself.—But it is not too late.—We are not married yet !”

How curiously passion colours facts ! No one will say that Cecil had not what is called abundant “evidence” for his suspicion, and the evidence was coherent enough to justify to his own mind all that he thought. It is constantly so in life. We set out with a presumption, and all the “facts” fit in so well with the presumption, that we forget it is after all not the *facts*, but the *interpretation* which is the important thing we seek, and instead of seeking this we have begun by assuming it ; whereas had we assumed some other interpretation, we should perhaps have found the facts quite as significant, although the second interpretation would be diametrically opposed to the former.

Had Cecil, instead of seeking for corroborative facts to pamper his own irritable jealousy, just asked himself whether the characters of Blanche and the captain were not quite sufficient of themselves to throw discredit on any suspicion of the kind—whether, indeed, he ought to entertain such an idea of such persons, unless overwhelmed by the most

clear, precise, unequivocal evidence—he would have saved himself all the tortures of jealousy, and would not have desecrated the worship of his love by thoughts so debasing and so odious.

Blanche, perfectly bewildered, sat silent and trembling, keeping her eyes fixed upon the strangely altered bearing of her lover.

Stopping from his agitated walk, he suddenly stood still, folded his arms, gazed at her with quiet fierceness, and said,—

“As Captain Heath takes so much interest in you, perhaps he will have no objection to escort you back to your father.”

“Cecil! . . . Cecil! . . . In Heaven’s name, *what* do you mean?” she said, half rising from her chair; but afraid to trust her trembling limbs, she sank back again, and looked at him in helpless astonishment.

“My meaning is very plain, very,” he said, with intense coldness. “You are free to return to your family, or not to return, if you prefer remaining with Captain Heath. Perhaps,” he added sarcastically, “as he is so partial to marriage, he will marry you himself.”

She strove to speak, but a choking sensa-

tion at the throat prevented her. She saw him leave the room without having strength to recall him, without ever making a motion to prevent him.

In mute despair, she heard his heavy tread upon the stairs, and like a person stunned, felt no command of her faculties, scarcely felt anything beyond a stupid bewildering prostration of the soul.

With flushed face and heated brain, Cecil rushed into the street, and wandered distractedly away. The fresh air somewhat cooled his burning brow, and the exercise gradually enabled him to recover his self-possession. He began to doubt whether he had not been rash in his suspicions.

"It is quite true that Heath has taken a most extraordinary part in the whole affair; but I remember now, that, during our interview in my room, he seemed by no means anxious I should marry her; indeed I taunted him with wishing to get me out of the way. He offered me the secretaryship to enable me to marry, and when I refused that he set his face against . . . I have been an ass! . . .

"And yet his conduct is inexplicable. He loves her, and she knows it. . . . What a

web entangles me! . . . I will return and question her; she cannot deceive me . . . she is not altogether lost . . . I will try her."

With this purpose he returned.

Meanwhile, Captain Heath had found Blanche weeping bitterly, under the degrading accusation of Cecil's jealousy; and having extorted from her some incoherent sentences, which made him aware of what had passed, he said, "My dear Blanche, I am going to bid you have courage for an act of fortitude. You must struggle with yourself—you must reason calmly for a moment."

"Oh, tell me, tell me what to do. How shall I eradicate his suspicions?"

"You cannot do it. In one so weak and capricious—one who could think so unworthily of you, and upon such ridiculous appearances—jealousy is incurable. It will bring endless misery upon you. It will destroy all love, all confidence. If he suspects you already, what is to secure you from his suspicions hereafter? Blanche, you must quit this. Return with me to your father's; he will receive you kindly."

"No, no, no," sobbed the unhappy girl.

"Yes, Blanche. It is a hard alternative,

but it is the best. You ought to rejoice in *his* injustice, because it displays him in his true colours. He tells you what you have to expect."

"I love him."

"Alas! I know it; but you see how he repays your love."

She only sobbed in answer.

"He will make you miserable for ever. Now, before the irrevocable step is taken, release yourself from such a fate: return with me."

She wept, but could not speak.

Heath's arguments at last prevailed; and, in a tone of terrible despair, she exclaimed, "Take me home, then."

A flash of joy passed over his sad face as he heard this heart-broken phrase, which assured him that, however his beloved Blanche might suffer at first, she was at least saved from the certain misery of becoming the wife of Cecil Chamberlayne.

On reaching the hotel, Cecil ran rapidly up stairs, and on the first landing stood aghast, at seeing Blanche coming down, leaning on the captain's arm. She was weeping, and her face was hidden by the handkerchief with which she wiped her eyes.

"Where are you taking her?" Cecil fiercely asked.

"Home," was the stern reply.

"Home! Whose home? yours?"

"To her father."

"And by whose authority?" he said, in a low, hoarse, almost suffocated voice.

"Her own," was the crushing answer.

They passed on.

Cecil, amazed, bewildered, could merely utter, in a tone of sad and reproachful inquiry, "Blanche!"

A stifled, agonizing sob burst from her; but clinging closer to her protector, she hurried him on.

Cecil leaned against the banister for support. As Blanche reached the bottom of the stairs, she could not resist giving a parting look; and the anguish of the face which then met her eye so completely changed her feelings, that, forgetting all Captain Heath had said, she flew up the stairs and threw herself into Cecil's arms, exclaiming, "My own beloved, you will not send me from you?"

He pressed her frantically to his heart, and carried her back to their apartment.

Captain Heath's face was contracted by a

fearful spasm as he slowly sought his own room. Once more were his hopes crushed; once more had he to renounce the visions of exquisite bliss which filled his soul. On the point of for ever separating Blanche from her unworthy lover, as he had imagined, and with the opening which that separation made for his own future prospects, he now again saw that the struggle was useless, and that Blanche was irretrievably lost to him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DENOUEMENT.

FOUR days afterwards, Meredith Vyner received this letter :—

“They are married at last; and are now gone to Broadstairs for the honeymoon. It is a sad affair; but it was inevitable. May she be happy !

“I was to have given her away; but, from some caprice on his part, it was not permitted; and the office was performed by one of his club friends, a certain Mr. Forrester. I was present, however; though not invited. From one of the side pews, I witnessed the ceremony. The last words of dear Blanche were, that I should intercede for her with you; which, God knows, I would, did I think that a father’s heart needed the intercession! But your kind nature is quite assurance enough to me.

“I am forced to go to Italy, to join my brother; and, as I have no time to lose, Mrs. Vyner will, I dare say, excuse my taking formal leave. Pray, let my trunks be packed, and forwarded to me, at Southampton, where I shall be to-morrow.

“You shall hear further from me soon; now I am too busy to write more.”

In the calm tone of this letter there is the same stoicism which always enabled this brave man if not to conquer, at least to conceal his emotions. Who could have suspected the misery which really lay concealed in those few lines?

The adroitness with which he recommended Blanche to her father's generosity, showed how affection will sharpen the wits, and make even the most candid people cunning, to attain their ends. He knew that Mrs. Vyner had too much need of money, not to grudge any bestowed upon the girls; and that Vyner himself was little likely to suffer his regard for his child, such as it was, to withstand his wife's persuasion. Therefore, to have pleaded in Blanche's favour, would have been to call down certain defeat. Instead of that, he adroitly assumed

that Vyner could not need any intercession—could not, as a father, do otherwise than pardon his daughter. To refuse the pardon, would therefore be to act contrary to all expectation. The question was thus not discussed, but settled.

The second point in his letter is, the journey to Italy : that needs only a very brief comment : he hoped, in the confusion of foreign scenes, to distract his thoughts from grief.

Farewell, then, thou brave, honest, self-sacrificing man ! May travel bring oblivion ! may time bring consolation to thy sad and noble heart !

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

ROSE VYNER TO FANNY WORSLEY.

WYTTON HALL, 14th Oct. 1840.

MY DEAR FANNY,

SINCE poor Blanche's unfortunate marriage—and yet why should I call it unfortunate? has she not married the man of her choice, and is not that the great ideal we maidens all aspire to? However, as it is the fashion here to speak of it as a “most unfortunate business,” over which mama weeps (I don't clearly see why) and papa storms, I have caught the trick, and called it so to you.

To resume this broken sentence; or rather to begin it anew: since Blanche's *fortunate*

marriage, our days have passed equably enough; but although not characterized by any "incidents," nor affording any "news," they have not been stupid. Life has not been stagnant. The slow growth of passions has proceeded without interruption. Marmaduke Ashley has become the devoted slave of Violet. I call him her Brazilian Othello. I made her very angry yesterday, by telling her that she should be less cruelly haughty to him, "for is he not," said I, "*a man and a brother?*" They would make a superb couple, for although I tease her with references to gentlemen of colour, and with congratulatory remarks respecting the chain being "broken, and Africa being free," you must know that his complexion is not really darker than that of a Spaniard. And you know how lovely *she* is—no you don't, you have not seen her since she shook off girlish things, and cannot imagine how she has altered.

Poor Marmaduke, although he has made some impression on her, will have, I fear, to languish a long while ere the haughty beauty condescends to step down from her pedestal. Almost as long as I shall have to wait before the modest Julius will understand, without my

being forced to tell him, that he is not absolutely indifferent to a certain saucy girl at whom he makes sweet eyes.

You can't imagine how, every day, my admiration deepens for the little man. I am always finding some new illustration of his excellence; always hearing something which confirms my opinion of his nobility of soul. Yesterday, I found that he was studying hard for the bar, not because he was without fortune, but because he would not consent to his mother being poorer at the death of his father than she had been before. He was the heir to all the property, except a jointure; but he refused to enter into possession while his mother lived, and as every man ought, he says, to be able to gain his own livelihood, he has determined to gain his at the bar.

He has recently been exerting himself to procure a good subscription list to a volume of poems. Here is the title. "GLOOMS AND GLEAMS. By One who has suffered."

I am as a weed

Torn from the rock, on ocean's foam to sail,
Where'er the wave or tempest's breath prevail.

BYRON.

The mysterious one—the one who has suffered

(*what* not specified!) is a newly discovered wonder—the Sappho of Walton—the daughter of a linen-draper.

According to Julius she is really a clever deserving girl, a little wild in her notions, but with all the generosity of genius, which redeems her affectations and her follies. She is too poor to venture on publication herself; and I have just found that Julius, unable to secure a sufficient sum by subscription, has undertaken to pay the printing expenses. He stipulated that this should be a secret; but her grateful father disclosed it to Mrs. Roberts (our housekeeper) who disclosed it to me. Imagine the gossip there will be in Walton over this publication! How the papas and mamas, the uncles and maiden aunts will moralize over the corruption of the age, and the wild audacious vanity of their townswoman! A poetess in Walton? Why a volume of poems—(unless they were low church effusions or the inspirations of “advanced Christians”) is itself a rarity. You know how slightly tainted with literature the small towns of England usually are? I doubt if any are so colourless as Walton. Dickens penetrates here—where does not his genial

sunshine penetrate?—but no other name of those blown from the brazenly impudent trumpet of fame has ever found an echo in Walton. A poetess is, consequently, looked upon as something short of a sorceress: a fearful and Appalling Illustration of the Reckless March of Intellect which Devastates the World!

Julius has already secured her an influential patron in Sir Chetsom Chetsom, and his brother Tom Chetsom. The baronet is possessor of the Dingles, a fine estate within three miles of Walton, and is looked up to as one of the great people of the county. Such a figure as he is! I must sketch him for your amusement.

Sir Chetsom Chetsom is not without considerable daring, for with the weight of six or seven and sixty years upon his shoulders, he makes a gallant dash at thirty. His whiskers are miraculously black, always well-oiled, and stiffly curled; his eyebrows are of another black in virtue of his inheritance from nature; and his hair is of a third black in virtue of Truefit's well directed efforts at *wigmanity*. This threefold darkness, unsuspecting of a gray hair, overshadows a sallow, wrinkled

brow and cheeks, upon which a hare's foot imitates the ruddy glow of youth with a sort of Vauxhall-by-daylight-splendour. Under the genuine eyebrows, float two colourless eyes, between which a high and well-shaped nose rears its haughty form. Frightfully regular teeth, without a speck, without a gap, fill up the gash which represents his mouth. A well-padded chest, and well-stayed waist, ending in shrunken legs and excruciatingly tight-booted feet complete the *physique* of this Adonis. His dress is a perpetual book of fashions!

Of the *morale* I know little, except that he never plays cards—flatters himself he has not come to that *yet*—talks fluently of valtzing (particular about sounding the *w* as *v*, as a young gentleman after his first German lesson), adores Fanny Elssler, calls Grisi a *naice leetle giarl enough*, thinks himself, and wishes to be accepted as, a remorseless Lovelace, and is always afraid of talking too long with one woman, lest he should “compromise her.”

This ferocious lady-killer, whom you will at once place amongst that very terrific and numerous class of men which I have christened Murders, has a brother, whom I wonder

he does not disown, so frankly does that brother bear his age. Tom Chetsom, "jolly Tom Chetsom," as he is called, is "a tun of a man," with a bald, shiny pate fringed with straggling grey hair, a rubicund face, a vinous nose, and a moist, *oystery* eye, rolling in rheum. Yet this implacable exhibition of age in a younger brother is tolerated by the baronet, who is blind enough, or stupid enough, not to be aware of the comment it is on his own resplendent juvenility !

Tom Chetsom, careless *bon vivant* as he seems, and is, conceals beneath that rubicund jollity an astute selfishness, and a real knowledge of life and human nature, to which his elder brother makes great pretension. But that which the elder *seems* to be without being it, the younger *is* without seeming it, as Browning would say.

Well, these are the patrons selected for our Walton Sappho. They are to launch her into the "great world." Sir Chetsom has permitted the dedication of *Glooms and Gleams* to himself. He is to introduce the volume into the "first circles," while Tom Chetsom is to bruit its fame in all the clubs.

I have not yet seen the poetess herself; but

propose to fall in with the general "rage," and pay a visit at the Grange some day when she is there. I will give you a full description.

And there is an end of my budget.

CHAPTER II.

THE WOMAN WITH A MISSION.

Ein starker Geist in einem zarten Leib
Ein zwitter zwischen Mann und Weib,
Gleich ungeschickt zum Herrschen und zum Lieben,
Ein kind mit eines Riesen Waffen
Ein Mittelding von Weisen und von Affen !

SCHILLER.—*Die Berühmte Frau.*

MARMADUKE and Violet, “so justly formed to meet by nature,” have not, it may be supposed, remained insensible to each other’s charms. The elopement of Blanche gave him several opportunities of making eloquent remarks on the superiority of affection—the riches of the heart—to mere worldly wealth ; and to utter several stinging sarcasms on those who gave up the worship of a loving heart, for the tumpety advantages of an establishment and a position.

These sarcasms were, of course, meant for

Mrs. Meredith Vyner, who accepted them in bland silence, or made vague defences, saying that women were often misguided, because the *whole* of the facts were not known.

Violet so entirely responded to his sentiments, and, without knowing the previous connection between him and her mother, so unhesitatingly applied those sarcasms to her, that she became more and more attracted to him, from the fact that they alone seemed rightly to have read her mother's character.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner saw, with strangely mingled jealousy and pleasure, the growing attachment of these two. She did not love Marmaduke: she had never loved him in any high or generous sense of the term. But he had filled her girlish imagination, and he still exercised a certain fascination over her. She admired his beauty; she delighted in the sense of power exercised over so fiery and impetuous a creature; it was exquisite flattery. To see her place occupied in his heart was, therefore, singularly irritating. His anger was an avowal of his love. His threats of vengeance, much as she might dread them, were the threats of one who suffered in his love. And so clearly did she perceive this, that it occasioned

no surprise to observe how, in the same measure as his attachment grew to Violet, his anger seemed to abate, his mind no longer to run upon its old topics of inconstancy and vengeance. No surprise, but great jealousy !

Other feelings mingled with this. She could not but be delighted to think that Marmaduke had ceased to harbour any schemes against her peace : the tiger was pacified, or attracted by other prey. This was not all. She hated Violet, and watched the development of this passion with curious eagerness, because in it she foresaw two sources of misery to her daughter. If they married, she thought they would be mutually wretched, and it was in her power at any time to make Violet horribly jealous, by informing her of Marmaduke's early attachment. That was one source ; another was, with a little coquetry and cunning on her part, to bring him once more at her feet, which, she doubted not, she could still effect.

Under the "still life" of what seemed the most uneventful of country residences, under the smooth current of every-day occupations, such were the tempests rumbling in the deeps, and ready at an instant to burst forth ! The drama was really there ; it *seemed* to be else-

where. The development and collision of passions, out of which the dramas of life are constructed, were circumscribed within the walls of the Hall and the Grange. But it was elsewhere that the noisy bustle of event—noisy because of its emptiness—attracted the attention of spectators, and seemed, by the talk occasioned, to have absorbed all the interest which could possibly lie in the elements afforded by the neighbourhood.

But, first, a word respecting one of the principal actors. I mean Hester Mason, the poetess. Had Rose's letter, in which, according to promise, she doubtless gave a detailed description of the Walton Sappho fallen into my hands, you should have been treated with her lively account of this important personage: her womanly acuteness and observation would have assuredly delighted you. As it is, my matter-of-fact pen must be the substitute.

Hester Mason was five and twenty, and still wrote Miss before her name; not because adorers were backward, but because they were Waltonians. They had no "spirituality;" they had no "imaginings;" they had no "mission." Life to them had no "earnestness;" they lived without a "purpose."

Cowards, they humbled themselves before "conventionalities," and dared not tell society to its face that it was a lie. They went to church; they called themselves Christians, because they followed an antiquated routine, and did not comprehend the later "developments" of Christianity necessitated by the "wants of the age." Above all, they shuddered at the true doctrine of social regeneration, that, namely, of the emancipation of woman, and thought that marriage should be indissoluble. They were humdrums!

Not to one of those could she descend; her soul was too lofty, her passions too "devouring," to waste themselves on such "clods." Indeed, had she been less of a "priestess," she might have been equally exclusive; since the Waltonians were utterly without taste for literature, philosophy, or art; and were as ill looking as the inhabitants of small towns usually are. Hester had been thrice on a visit of a few days to London; she had seen Hyde Park and its brilliant company; she had walked down St. James's-street and Pall Mall, and on the doorsteps of the clubs had seen men who were gods compared with the dandies of Walton. She had feasted upon

contemporary literature, and had written burning letters of wild enthusiasm to Bulwer, in imitation of his "Florence Lascelles." She had dreamed ambitious dreams, in which she held a sceptre in London society, and awoke to find herself in Walton!

Hester was handsome, but coarse-featured. Her black hair and eyes gave a certain *éclat* to a face ornamented with a nose which irredeemably betrayed her low birth, and surmounted by a forehead too high and large for beauty. She was about the middle height, and had a magnificent bust. Her hands were large and coarse; her legs were—to express them in one word, I should say they were *Devonshire legs*! In her dress, gait, and manner you saw something which, though not positively vulgar, was distinctly not ladylike; a certain *brusquerie*, almost pertness, and a dogmatism, which is at all times shocking in a woman.

About the time when Julius St. John first interested himself in the publication of her volume of poems, Hester, worn out with awaiting her "ideal," and almost despairing of ever reigning in London society, began so far to humble herself in her own eyes, as to

admit the attentions of the surgeon's apprentice, newly arrived at Walton. True it is that James Stone, the foresaid apprentice, had a dash of London about him. He was not a Waltonian, he was not a humdrum ; so far from it, that he had the character of a "rake!" He discoursed about the ballet; had been behind the scenes at the theatres; was well-versed in Jullien's promenade concerts (then a novelty); smoked a meerschaum; and when in full-dress turned his shirt-sleeve cuffs over his coat, much to the amazement of the Waltonians, who imagined he had just washed his hands, and had forgotten to turn back his cuffs, so little did they appreciate the dandyism!

It may appear strange, but that little trait of elegance won more of Hester's admiration than all his personal charms, and they were not few, could have effected in a month. It gave him a London air. It made him so superior to the provincial bumpkins, who laughed with coarse ridicule at an elegance they could not understand. It was in vain Hester, bridling, told them that the "pink of fashion and the mould of form"—the all-accomplished Count D'Orsay—wore his cuffs in that way. They only

laughed the more, and christened Stone—the Walton *De Orsay*.

As long as Stone held out against the ridicule which his innovation excited, Hester accorded him her sympathy, and almost her love. But when he yielded to public opinion, and turned back his cuffs to their original place, she suddenly cooled towards him. It was a submission to conventionalities. It was a truckling to society. It was cowardice.

He purchased his pardon, however, and by a speech so adroit that in Walton it must have appeared worthy at least of a Lauzun—had Lauzun's name ever been heard there.

“If I do not yield this trifle to public opinion they will force me to quit this place, and to quit the place would be quitting *you*.”—She forgave him.

But her pardon availed him little. Invited by Mrs. St. John to the Grange, patronized by the “great people” round Walton, her volume on the eve of being launched into the wide sea of literature, she felt all her old ambition revive within her, and scarcely forgave herself for having idled away an hour with such a youth as Stone—too poor for a husband, too insignificant for a lover.

The patronage of Sir Chetsom Chetsom completed her intoxication. That graceless old Lovelace, struck with the beauty of his protégé, saw at once the facilities afforded him for an intrigue. He was constantly at her father's. Her poems made the pretext of his visits. Her charms formed the staple of his conversation; varied by accounts of London society, and visions of the brilliant career which awaited her if she only determined boldly to enter it.

A sorry figure, truly, was the wigged and whiskered baronet for a girl with "bright imaginings," and at five and twenty, to choose as her lover; and yet, if I have contrived to indicate her character properly, the reader will not be surprised at her lending a willing ear to the old boy's artful flatteries.

He was not young, but he was rich. He had no "imaginings," but he could tell of the splendours of the capital. He had no "mission," but he wore *bottes vernies*. He was without "earnestness," but he talked fluently of all the new works, and had met most of the literary lions in society.

More than all, he was Sir Chetsom Chetsom, and she was Hester Mason the linen-

draper's daughter. Rank gives a lustre which dazzles even virtue; and Hester had very few scruples of virtue to struggle against; so that ambition found her an easy victim. She coquetted—she was “cruel” to her adorer; not because she was afraid to yield, but because she wished to sell her honour dearly.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT WAS SAID OF THE WALTON SAPPHO.

“Is it not shocking?” said Mrs. Ruddles, the curate’s wife, to Mrs. Spedley, the surgeon’s better half, as she sipped the smoking bohea, and commented on the ongoings of Walton, and its “muse” in particular,—“Is it not shocking to witness such depravity? To think of his taking up with such trumpery as Hester Mason!”

“And to think of her encouraging the wicked, old villain!” ejaculated the indignant Mrs. Spedley.

“And her father to shut his eyes!” suggested the post-mistress of Walton.

“What can she expect will be the end of it?”

“I’m sure, I can’t say.”

"He's married, too," said Stone, angrily; for Stone was now utterly neglected: he had even turned up his shirt cuffs, with D'Orsay magnificence, on the preceding Sunday; and still Hester had not vouchsafed him a look.

"Married! yes; but he could get nobody to live with him; and his wife has been separated many years," observed Mrs. Ruddles; "and no wonder!"

"So that Hester falls with her eyes open . . . she can't expect him to marry her—the minx!" said Mrs. Spedley.

"Oh, no. Besides, she looks upon marriage as immoral."

"Ah!"

"Yes, yes: very comfortable notions *those* are for some people."

"Very. *This* comes of writing poetry!" gravely and philosophically remarked the surgeon's wife.

Her husband entered at that moment.

"Pretty poetry it is!" he said. "Hang me, if I can make head or tail of it. Long words and inflated sentiments—nothing else!"

"Such trash!" scornfully added Mrs. Ruddles.

"So frivolous!" chimed in Mrs. Spedley.

“As if there was anything in that, to cock up one’s head about,” pursued Mrs. Ruddles.

“And, to fancy herself so superior to every one else.”

“Well, give me good, common sense in a woman,” fervently ejaculated Spedley.

“And me.”

“And me.”

“Oh, and me.”

“It was but last night,” said Spedley, “that she took upon herself to set me right about the vote by ballot; and, instead of arguing the point, she told me that I was incapable of forming an opinion on it, ignorant as I was of the *rapid developments of humanity*. To be sure, I was,—how should I know what she meant by that?”

“He—he—he!” tittered Mrs. Spedley.—“Developments of humanity, indeed!”

“That is a philosophy *she* understands,” said Stone, sarcastically; “and will certainly give us an *illustration* of it *herself* shortly ——”

Stone chuckled immensely at this *double entendre*; and the ladies, forgetting their prudery in their spite, laughed too, and declared that nothing was more likely.

That is only a sample of what was said in Walton. The whole town was busy with the event. Envy aided tittle-tattle; and not a voice was raised in Hester's defence. Sir Chetsom to visit her! Sir Chetsom to drive up to her door! Sir Chetsom to send her game! Sir Chetsom to take her drives in his curricule. It was enough to make an English community, like that of Walton, mad. How she escaped lapidation is a mystery.

Hester knew the scandal she occasioned, and triumphed in it. To be the mark for jealousy, was a condition affixed to superiority. Detraction was the tribute impotence paid to power. She was hated—she knew it—how could it be otherwise?—was she not a genius? At their gossip she laughed; with society and its *sophisms* she was at open war.

Having had this one glimpse of the state of opinion in Walton, let us now turn our attention to the Hall. The St. Johns, Marmaduke, Tom Wincot, and the family, are in the drawing room. Julius holds the volume of Hester's poems in his hands, having just finished reading it aloud:—

“Now, Mr. Vyner,” said Julius, “do you rescind your harsh judgment; will you not

admit that there is at least great facility in these poems?"

"Facility?" replied Vyner. "Yes, yes,

Nempe incomposito dixi pede currere versus.

I find too much of it: fatal facility, betraying the want of that *labor limæ*, without which no work can have value."

"She will learn the difficult 'art to blot' in time," suggested Julius; "at present she is all exuberance."

"Is not overluxuriance," said Violet, "rather the property of weeds than of flowers?"

"Certainly," said Vyner. "The volume wants weeding sadly. You know what 'Horace' says?—

*Ut brevitæ opus, ut currat sententiæ, neu se
Impediat verbis lassas onerantibus aures."*

"Well," interrupted Rose; "but not to be so critical, do you not think the volume shows great power?"

"Rather the *will* to be great than the *power*," said Marmaduke. "It is daring and extravagant, but it does not seem to me to have the daring and extravagance of genius."

"Doesn't it stwike you as vewy stwange that a young woman should wite in such twemendous misewy? Nothing but seduc-

tions, delusions, bwoke hearts, pwestwated spiwits, agonies of wemorse, tewible pwedictions, wetched wevewies, and all that sort of thing! Besides, what does she pwopose when she wepeatedly weitewates the necessity of some better and more weflective Chwistianity?"

"Those are the extravagances I speak of."

"I confess," said Violet, "I do not like the tricks she plays with language: surely all those uncouth compounds, and those obtrusive vowels which everybody else consents to drop, are useless affectations?"

"Those are the conquests of the New School," said Marmaduke.

"I thought that our great poets had found the language harmonious and flexible enough."

"You see, Mr. St. John," said Rose, laughing, "they are determined to pull your poetess to pieces. Don't hear any more. I will admire her with you, and we shall form the fit audience, though few."

The conversation did not cease here; but we have heard enough. Let us hurry, therefore, to Belgravia, where resides Sir Chetsom Chetsom, who has been forced to run up to town for a few days, and is now seated opposite his

brother, his hand upon the claret decanter, listening to a brotherly remonstrance.

"I tell you, Chet, she is *une intriguante*: underneath all that romance and extravagance, I see a very cool calculation. In the letter you have just read me, I divine her character."

"What is there in that to make you suspicious?"

"Oh! no single passage, but the whole tone. Do but consider for a moment. Here are you, a married man, writing love-letters to an unmarried girl; she does not repulse you—she does not even *pretend* to be offended—she says nothing about your wife, nothing about the unmistakable nature of your intentions."

"But I tell you, Tom, the girl is decidedly fond of me."

"Humph."

"You doubt it?"

"Considerably."

"Very well, very well. I, who see her, who watch her, and who flatter myself know *something* of women—I think so, and that is enough."

"Do you ever look in the glass, Chet?"

"Often."

"And the result is?"

“Very different from what must occur in your case, Tom, if ever you venture on such a piece of temerity.”

“And you think yourself still capable of inspiring a passion?”

“The thing is done.”

“And *you* are done, Chet,” said Tom Chetsom, placing one bulbous finger at the side of his vinous nose, and closing one oystery eye, by way of pantomimic comment on his words.

“You don’t know women, Tom.”

“Well, let us grant for a moment that you have made an impression; don’t you see the imprudence of having an intrigue so near your home, in a little place where every action is noticed and discussed?”

“I don’t care a fig what they discuss. That’s the giarl’s look out, not mine, damme! If neither she nor her father object to my visits, why should I be squeamish?”

“Why? Because you will be the laughter of the county.”

“Thank ye, Tom.”

“I’m serious, Chet. Your age is tolerably well known *there*, and you may imagine the gossip and the ridicule which will attach to

any affair of yours with a young girl. It will be the talk of the whole county."

Sir Chetsom knew that quite as well as his knowing brother; but what his brother did not know, was that the great attraction in this intrigue consisted in the very fact so distinctly enunciated: "It will be the talk of the whole county!" He wished it to be so. He anticipated the scandal, and rejoiced thereat. He heard the chorus of virtuous matrons declaiming against his "wickedness," and the sound was exquisitely flattering. He shook his head with an air of knowing satisfaction as he read (in his mind's eye) the paragraphs in the local papers upbraiding him for his villainy. The phrase "The wretch! at *his* age to be seducing women!" flattered his anticipative ear more sweetly than any strain from Beethoven or Mozart could lull the spirit of a musician.

Tom Chetsom, frank old fellow, never once attempting to conceal a wrinkle, or to disguise a bald patch, could not comprehend his brother's secret pride in being made a butt. He understood the vanity of his brother's dandyism and juvenility: he saw specimens enough of that at his club. But knowing how all men, and above all men Sir Chetsom, shrunk from

ridicule, it was a puzzle to him that the inevitable ridicule of his intrigue with Hester should not be a bugbear to frighten him away. He forgot that amidst all the ridicule and reprobation, there would be a tacit acknowledgment of Sir Chetsom's lady-killing powers; and for that acknowledgment he could scarcely pay too dearly.

As a mere safeguard for his vanity, and not out of any illiberality, he had from the first determined upon making no settlement on Hester, in case she should consent to live with him. If his intrigue cost him anything, the laugh would justly be turned against him as a dupe. If it cost him nothing, the world would storm at his meanness, but they would believe in his power.

CHAPTER IV.

PROPHECIES FULFILLED.

“WHAT makes you so serious to-day, Mrs. St. John?” said Violet, about a week afterwards.

“I am getting anxious about my protégé. It was my Julius who introduced her to the notice of Sir Chetsom Chetsom ; and I fear no good will come of it.”

“Are you, then, of the Walton party?” asked Violet. “And do you lend an ear to all the scandal of that miserable place? Consider Sir Chetsom’s age.”

“Yes,” said Rose ; “but consider also his pretensions. We know Sir Chetsom is old ; but he wants to be thought young.”

“I assure you,” said Mrs. St. John, “it makes me very uneasy. Julius has already taken the liberty of speaking to him on the subject, as strongly as he could; but Sir Chet-som only laughed at what he called virtuous scruples. My only hope is, that Hester looks upon their difference of age and station as a sufficient warrant for an intimacy which she would not otherwise allow. And yet I fear it is not so. I hope I may wrong her. I do not wish to think uncharitably; but from what I have observed of late, I think she is ambitious and unscrupulous.”

“We must remember,” said Violet, “that her very opinions on the emancipation of woman would lead her to adopt a freedom of manner, which, though it might be very innocent, would be so unlike the conduct of well-educated girls, that we, judging her by the ordinary rules, should be guilty of great injustice.”

Mrs. St. John shook her head.

“Mrs. St. John demurs,” said Rose.

“I do, indeed. I look with suspicion on

those opinions. When I see a woman disdaining the ordinary notions of society, I expect to see her follow out her own opinions, and disdain the ordinary practices of society."

Meredith Vyner joined them.

"We are discussing the old subject, Hester Mason," said Mrs. St. John.

"And giving her all the virtues under the sun, poetry included," said Vyner. "Well, you have chosen a good subject. We don't often meet with such a paragon. Where, indeed, in this prosaic place should we look for such another

*Cui Pudor, et Justitiæ soror
Incorrupta Fides, nudaque Veritas,
Quando ullum inveniet parem?*

"By the irony of your tone," said Mrs. St. John, "I suspect you have heard something new about her."

"No, nothing new; at least nothing unexpected."

"What is it? Pray, let us hear it."

"The most natural thing in the world she last night went off with Sir Chetsom

Chetsom. *Interdum deliramus senes*, as Plautus saith."

This information was received in silence. Mrs. St. John coloured deeply, and then turned pale. She was greatly hurt, because she considered herself in some measure the cause of this misfortune, by having first brought Hester into notice, and then having introduced her to Sir Chetsom.

It was too true. Hester had gone off; and Sir Chetsom had taken good care that it should not be a secret.

It would need a more graphic brush than mine to paint the tumult of scandalized virtue in Walton at this outrage upon public morals. To paint the swelling indignation of Mrs. Ruddles, the vehemence of offended purity in Mrs. Spedley, the uplifted hands and eyes of the mute but expressive post-mistress, the sarcasms of Stone, the brutal jests of Spedley, the moral declamation of the Rev. Richard Ruddles, the sneers, the epithets of abuse, the prophecies of what "her end would be," the homilies on infidelity, poetry, and "new-

fangled notions," and the constantly-reiterated but never-too-old reflections which each and all made upon their own sagacity in having "all along foreseen it."

The howl of Walton reached not Hester's ears ; and if it had, it would only have sounded like the shouts of triumph in an ovation.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASTUTE MRS. VYNER.

L'epoux retint cette leçon par cœur.
Onc il ne fut une plus forte dupe
Que ce vieillard, bon homme au demeurant.

LAFONTAINE.—*Contes.*

ON returning to the hall, Meredith Vyner found a letter from Cecil. He retired into his study; for he was one of those who fancy that you cannot possibly read anything with attention elsewhere than in a study. Having deliberately adjusted his spectacles, and taken a liberal pinch, he began the perusal.

Its contents may easily be guessed. It was very penitent, very clever, contained two adroit quotations from 'Horace,' and a well-worked-up petition for pardon. Blanche signed it with

him, and added a pretty little postscript of her own.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner having learned from Rose that a letter had arrived, the handwriting of which looked like Cecil's, hastened to join her husband, whom she found not only in his own study, but in what is usually termed a "brown study." He was sitting in an easy-chair. His body slightly bent forward; the spectacles shifted from his nose to his forehead, one arm resting on the inner part of his thigh, the pendent hand grasping the opened letter, the other arm resting on the table, the hand caressing his snuff-box.

"So you have had a letter from your son-in-law?" she said, as she entered.

He handed it to her. She read it slowly. On looking into his face as she returned it to him, she saw that he had forgiven them.

"A very clever epistle," she said; "very clever. And of course you grant the pardon. They know that very well. They were quite sure of that when they ran away, otherwise Cecil would not have been such a fool; but he

knew your weakness—knew how easily you were to be managed, and was quite sure that *I* should never oppose him.”

Meredith Vyner took a pinch, angrily.

“Shall we have them to live with us? I dare say that is what they expect—and, perhaps, it would be the best. Or do you intend making them an allowance?”

Meredith Vyner took three pinches, rapidly.

“Do you know, dear, I think, perhaps, it would be as well not to relent at once, because it will be such a precedent. Keep them waiting a little. They will be all the more grateful when it does come.”

“And *who* said it was to come at all?” asked the indignant Vyner.

“I took that for granted.”

“Yes, yes, of course, for granted. Everybody seems to take things in my house *for granted*. *I’m* not to be considered. *My* wishes are not to be consulted. And yet I believe I am master here—I may be wrong—but I fancy this house is mine.”

His wife smiled inwardly, as she added,
“And your children’s.”

“How my children’s?” he sharply asked.
“It is none of theirs; it will not even be theirs
at my death. Theirs, indeed!”

Mrs. Meredith Vyner knew perfectly well
the effect to be produced by her apparently
careless phrases, and played upon her husband’s
mind with a certainty of touch highly credit-
able to her skill.

“I am surprised, my dear Mary, to hear you
talk so. For granted, indeed! No; it shall *not*
be for granted; it shall not be at all. I *will* be
master in my own house. I have already sub-
mitted too much to my daughters; and they
shall find I will do so no more. A pretty
thing, indeed, to brave her father, to bring a
slur upon her name by running away with a
penniless adventurer: a man I don’t like; a
mere superficial dabbler, who pretends to
understand ‘Horace,’ and is quite at sea with
respect to the Horatian metres. He’ll never
do anything; never be anything. And yet he
expects that he has only to write me a whining

letter, and all will be forgotten. He doesn't think it possible I can refuse. No, no; takes my pardon for granted. But it is not granted. It shall not be."

"This will soon blow over, I'm not at all afraid for my dear Blanche. You will not be able to hold out long."

"There is your mistake."

"We shall see, we shall see," said she, with a tone of most expressive certainty of the truth of what she said, and left the room.

Meredith Vyner was seldom angry; but the provoking confidence of his wife, in what he chose to consider her opinion of his weakness, made him furious against the cause thereof—the offending Cecil.

From what impulses spring human actions! Here is a man delighted by the opportunity afforded him of forgiving his offending child, and ready to clasp her to his bosom. That is the natural instinct of his heart. His wife comes; and, by pretending to urge the very act he is about to perform, by choosing to assume it as a settled thing, and insinuating

thereby, that, from his known weakness, everybody must also assume it, she stifles the parental feeling, awakens his miserable vanity, and makes him exhibit his weakness by the very action which he intends as a proof of his fortitude and decision.

Resolved to show how mistaken those were who fancied that he was to be led by the nose, he sat down, and wrote this brief, and, as he thought, crushing reply :—

“ WYTTON HALL, 10th Nov. 1840.

“ SIR,

“ You have made an error in your calculations, I am not so easily bamboozled as you imagine. You are very clever, I have no doubt ; but,—

Vix illigatum te triformi
Pegasus expedit chimææræ.

And with this I close all correspondence between us.

“ Yours truly,

“ H. S. MEREDITH VYNER.”

“ That quotation is rather happy,” he said

to himself, as he folded the letter. Indeed, so pleased was he at its felicity, that it would now have cost him some pangs not to send the letter; he could not afford to lose such an effect.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner was very shortly after found sobbing in her room, by Rose. To the anxious inquiries of the affectionate girl, at first no other reply could be elicited than—

“Oh, my poor Blanche!—poor Blanche!” accompanied by fresh sobs.

After about five minutes of this irritating and inexplicit grief, Rose managed to ascertain that Blanche was not to be forgiven.

“Impossible!” she exclaimed. “Oh, I will go this instant, and intercede for her!”

“Do, my dear—do—lose no time! And, Rose, don’t mention that you have seen me. Pretend to know nothing, except that Cecil has written; and ask your papa when we are to see them, just as if it were a matter of course that he would forgive them.”

“I will.”

She went. Her success may be imagined; Vyner stormed at her; said, she was just like her sister, and had been so long accustomed to regard him as a cipher, that she could not even suppose him capable of punishing such an act of wretched disobedience.

On going to bed that night, Meredith Vyner seemed to have become greatly pacified by the day's reflections.

"It is rather a good letter that, of Cecil's," he said. "Well expressed."

"Very," answered his wife. "Perhaps rather too well expressed for sincerity. "But he's a clever fellow. I always liked him. He is so gay and rattling."

"Better qualities in a guest than a son-in-law!"

"Humph! That depends ——"

"His first quotation from Horace, too, is very well chosen—pat and pointed. Not so good, though, as mine to him! Egad! that was a stinger. Still, his deserves praise."

"I rather suspect, dear, that he made Horace a go-between. He pretended to be very in-

terested in the poet, in order that he might woo the editor's daughter."

"No, indeed, there you wrong him. He came to me at first purely out of love for Horace. He took great interest in my commentary—I must do myself the justice to say that it is a little out of the common—and he seemed to think so. He was never tired of it, till his head got stuffed full of foolish love nonsense. When he began hankering after Blanche, he left off reading my commentary. Still I cannot deny that the great attraction first was the study of my notes and emendations."

She saw that he was getting on dangerous ground, and therefore threw out this lasso:

"Well, well, he knows your weak point, and by that he will gain the day. You won't long be able to disown a son-in-law who can quote Horace *à propos*. So that if your natural goodness doesn't make you relent, Horace will!"

"You think so; but you are greatly mistaken."

In this way she from time to time restored

his faltering resolution. Whenever symptoms of relenting exhibited themselves, she contrived to banish them by irritating his vanity. Shakespeare, that great master of the human heart, has, in the third act of *Othello*, anticipated the scenes which are perpetually recurring between a cool, calculating scoundrel and his writhing, unsuspecting victim. With consummate art, Iago always manages to keep before Othello's mind, the very idea he pretends to banish or to palliate; and directly he sees his victim relenting, as thoughts of tenderness for Desdemona arise, Iago contrives that the very tenderness shall add intensity to his sense of wrong. For instance, Othello says:—

I do not think but Desdemona's honest.

Whereupon Iago, with brutal-seeming frankness, says:—

Long live she so! and long live you to think so!

Oth. And yet how nature erring from itself.

Iago. Ay, there's the point—As—to be bold with you—
Not to affect many proposed matches, &c.

With somewhat of the diabolical art Iago used, did the sylph-like humpback play upon

her husband. And when she began to fear that, after all, she might lose the game, she adroitly changed her tactics and said :—

“It has occurred to me that there is a way of settling this difficulty. Do not countenance Blanche’s disobedience—do not see her husband—but we can from time to time assist them secretly. I can give them money, as if from my own funds. You will not appear in the matter at all, and yet you will have the satisfaction of knowing they are not in want.”

This seemed so admirably calculated to save his dignity, and yet to preserve Blanche from the more serious consequences of his refusal, that he gladly adopted the suggestion.

Having gained this point, Mrs. Meredith Vyner sallied forth to pay some visits to her poor.

The devil is not so black as he is painted. Mrs. Vyner had her good qualities: and she was worshipped in her village. No one was so liberal to the poor; no one looked after the schools with greater or more judicious care; no one was more active in benevolence. She

not only did kind things, she said them also; and that is an element in benevolence many charitable people omit. She attended upon the sick; she comforted the sorrowing; she listened to their long stories; she gave them advice; she interested herself in their joys and sorrows.

From what we know of her, we shall not be altogether dupes of this benevolence: we shall not suppose it pure, unmixed kindness. But it would perhaps be grossly wronging her to believe that it was hypocrisy, that it had not some real good feeling at the bottom. Although we may, and not uncharitably, suppose there was some selfishness and ostentation in this care for the poor; we may also believe that she felt some of the real glow of generosity and delight in doing good. In the ordinary sense of the word, she had no "interest" in her conduct. She might have done her duty to the poor without going so far as she did. Their good opinion was of no "use" to her. Examine it how you will, you can discover none of the "interested motives" usually sup-

posed to influence the benevolence of selfish people.

Such a character is a paradox ; but only a paradox, because we are so prone to regard human nature as very simple and *all of a piece*, when, in truth, it is, as I have remarked before, marvellously complex. Mrs. Meredith Vyner was wicked, cruel, unloving, and selfish ; it would be a contradiction in terms, to add that she was also kind, generous, and benevolent ; but it is perfectly true that she would occasionally perform kind, generous, and benevolent actions perfectly disinterested. The secret I take to be this. Her cruelty was not wanton : it always had reference to some selfish object. But on occasions completely alien to her interest or her vanity, she could be kind ; and being an impulsive, imaginative woman where she *was* kind, she was strikingly so, thereby turning it into a thing of *éclat*, and so gratifying her vanity.

It was said of himself, by Benjamin Constant, "*Je puis faire de bonnes et fortes actions ; je ne puis avoir de bons procédés.*" This is a revela-

tion of the profound depths of certain minds ; and Mrs. Vyner belonged to that class. In a moment of enthusiasm she might even have forgotten her selfishness—or rather have staked all the gratification of her selfishness on the triumph of one moment ; but she could not have completed her sacrifice, she could not have gone through with any line of conduct after it had lost its *éclat* ; above all, she could not, in the ordinary transactions of life, have been generous, thoughtful, kind—she could not go through “ the little nameless unremembered acts of kindness and of love ” which constitute real goodness.

Her conduct towards the poor seems to be thus explained : they did not stand in her light ; nothing she could do, or omit to do for them could influence her interests. But they were picturesque objects which struck her imagination, and appealed to her protection. A little trouble and a little money made her their benefactress. The pleasure of doing good was a pleasure she could appreciate, and it could be purchased for so little.

If any one supposes from the foregoing remarks, that I have what is called *explained away* her benevolence, he is mistaken. There are hundreds quite as selfish, who cannot appreciate the pleasure of doing good ; and she is so far their superior.

CHAPTER VI.

FAINT HEARTS AND FAIR LADIES.

On this old beach
For hours she sat ; and evermore her eye
Was busy in the distance, shaping things
That made her heart beat quick.

WORDSWORTH.—*Excursion.*

AUTUMN was deepening fast. The green tints were rapidly disappearing, and the advancing year “breathed a browner horror o’er the woods.” Wytton still looked lovely ; the great variety of tints, from the dark brown of the copper beech, to the delicate yellow of the cut-leaved hornbeam, made the grounds as splendid as a setting sun. The paths strewn with fallen leaves, spoke feelingly of the approaching change, when the huge trees would be

stretching their melancholy branches out into the air, in gaunt loneliness.

Preparations were being made to quit Wytton for town, and both Marmaduke and Julius looked with regret upon the approaching separation. Town would never replace the country for them. They would see their idols there, it is true ; but they would no longer see them in the charming ease and *abandon* of Wytton Hall, or the Grange.

The country is the place for a nascent love ! It affords endless opportunities of *tête-à-têtes*, and the scenery gives a tone to the whole mind. London is very well for a flirtation, or when you cannot have the country. But its riot and bustle, its endless dissipation of your time and distraction of your thoughts, would alone make it greatly inferior to the country. Shut up in a country-house you have nothing to prevent an eternal brooding over your own thoughts ; and those thoughts, can they be more sweetly employed than in hovering round the image of the beloved ?

One bright, sunny, brisk, autumnal afternoon,

six horses stood saddled at the door of the hall. A ride to the sea-shore, about eight miles distant, had been determined on, Rose having expressed a desire for a good childish ramble on the sands to pick up shells, and crack the seaweed pops.

Meredith Vyner, Mrs. St. John, Marmaduke and Violet, Julius and Rose, formed the party. Mrs. Vyner stayed at home. All the visitors had left the Hall, so that the present party was as large as could be mustered. They formed three pleasant couples.

“I think the young people behind understand each other,” said Meredith Vyner to Mrs. St. John, as they rode ahead.

“I wish they did,” she replied.

“Do you then doubt it? I fancy Mr. Ashley’s attentions are unmistakeable, and Violet does not seem to look coldly on them. She is less haughty to him than to most people. Don’t you think she’s improved? Ah! I forgot, you did not know her then. She used to be a devil: such a temper! My poor little Mary, who, you know, is the timidest, mildest

creature alive, used to be frightened out of her wits at her. She never dared to suggest anything that was not perfectly agreeable, for Violet would burst out upon her—it was quite fearful! I never saw any of it myself. Violet was always well behaved enough before me. But I used constantly to find Mary in hysterics, or in tears; and although she always wished to spare Violet, and refused to specify what had been said and done, yet she could not conceal from me that my daughter's conduct was the cause of her emotion. However, thank God! sending her away from home seems to have tamed her. She is not very violent now, is she?"

"Violent! I think she is entirely charming. I know no girl possessing so much dignity and directness of mind. I quite love her."

"And what do you think of Mr. Ashley?"

"That he would make her an excellent husband. Julius, whose judgment is so good, has the highest opinion of him."

"And I," said Vyner,—“not to flatter you—have the highest opinion of your son Julius.

Upon my word, madam, you have a son to be proud of, as Horace says—

Micat inter omnes
Julium sidus, velut inter ignes
Luna minores.

A rare fellow ; and one who, as a son-in-law ——— Do you think there *is* anything there ?”

“With Rose? I am puzzled. Julius is somewhat secret on such matters, and although he admires Rose, I do not feel certain how far his admiration goes.”

“Well, you may tell him that he has not only my consent, but that nothing would please me more than to call him my son. Rose is a good girl ; somewhat saucy in her wit, which does not even respect her mother at all times, but there is no malice in her. Mary, who doats upon all my children as if they were her own, says she cannot wonder that such girls should exercise such empire over me ; for you must know, Mary fancies I am led by the nose by my affection for the girls, and that they have the whip hand, which is by no

means the case. I may have indulged them, perhaps, too much when they were younger; but I flatter myself no one ever was able to *lead me*."

It may be supposed, that during this ride, neither Marmaduke and Violet, nor Julius and Rose, were very silent; but their talk was made up of those delicious nothings to which time, place, and circumstance give significance, and tones and looks give eloquence: what George Sand finely calls *tous les riens immenses d'un amour naissant*. Haughty and impetuous as Violet was, she had great playfulness, and could unbend with bewitching ease. Marmaduke was also lively, and his animal spirits were stimulated by his desire to please. He was charming.

Chamfort—who has written some of the wittiest and profoundest aphorisms in the French language—has said—"Un homme amoureux est un homme qui veut être plus aimable qu'il ne peut, et voilà pourquoi presque tous les amoureux sont ridicules."

True enough: lovers do appear ridiculous

to lookers-on ; but that desire to please which prompts their words and actions, makes them loveable in the eyes of their mistresses. After all, the great secret of being pleasant is the wish to be so. It needs no grace of manner, no splendour of beauty or talent, to make all around you pleased at your approach. It only needs the honest wish to please.

Marmaduke was therefore charming in the eyes of Violet, although he said nothing during the whole of the ride, which could possibly be read with interest. His conversation was frivolous or commonplace enough, but it had the particular seal of amiability.

So also Rose, the witty, sparkling Rose, laughed and made them laugh, without having uttered a single joke fit to be repeated ; because if its wit happened to be undeniable, it would, nevertheless, ill bear transplanting.

This is the dilemma into which a novelist is forced if he chance to select a lively girl for a heroine : either he must consent to suppress her conversation, or else to give the impression of a vulgar, personal, flippant, disagreeable creature.

In real life, vivacity gives point to a poor joke, and carries off the coarseness from a personal witticism. A laughing girl, with roguish eyes, and unmistakeable hilarity of manner, may utter almost anything—commonplace or personality—not only with impunity, but with positive applause. But I am certain that if the conversation of lively young ladies were printed, it would be scouted as the coarse daubing of one who knew not what ladies were. Simply because a narrator can only give the words; he cannot give tone and manner.

Be good enough to understand, therefore, that Rose was provokingly witty, though I cannot repeat what she said. Take my word for it. Repose upon the “easier-to-be-imagined-than-described” belief. Represent to yourself a young and lively girl during a delightful canter, with her lover by her side, whom she likes to tease, and then “imagine” what conversation must have passed: there *can* be no difficulty about the wit, as you have to draw from your own stores.

A happy day they passed. The ride to the

sea-shore was through pleasant lanes, strewn with fallen leaves; and the sea-shore itself presented a magnificent view. The tide was very low, and the distant sands and sea had the appearance of the early dawn of a summer's day. The sails of a fishing-smack or two dotted the horizon. A fresh, salt sea-weed fragrance saluted their nostrils; the *scrunch* (beautiful word!) of small shells and pebbles followed their footsteps; small stranded crabs, with incoherent efforts, were hurrying here and there; huge entangled masses of weed offered their pops to Rose's delicate fingers; and a basketful of beautiful shells was soon the result of their search.

In this extremely primitive occupation, the time fled on. Meredith Vyner had wandered a long way down the shore, talking to Mrs. St. John respecting the virtues and accomplishments of his wife, and the manner in which his girls repaid her affection; which was followed up by a circumstantial history of his commentary on Horace: how the idea first came to him in reading a variorum edition: how

the more he learned to know the commentators, the more he had learned to despise them, and to feel that a new edition was imperatively called for: how he had worked for years at this edition, and how, in short, he had finally got together the materials from which his monument would be built.

The tide was fast returning, and a rolling sea poured its restless waters, like the plunging of a powerful steed. Violet, seated on a rock, was contemplating it in silence; in silence Marmaduke dropped little pebbles into a tiny pool of water left in the rock. Both were sad, but with the sadness which is sweeter than joy. Both were silent, but with the silence which is more eloquent than speech. The breeze was playing with their hair, the music of "old ocean's roar" was sounding in their ears; the declining rays of an autumnal sun gave a poetic splendour to the scene, which was disturbed by no sound save the ceaseless wash of the advancing tide as it rolled upon the shingle.

It was one of those exquisite moments when the soul seems to tremble with delight at every

thought which crosses it, when the susceptibility to external influences is so keen that the veriest trifles are robed in the splendour of imagination, and a scene which at other times would attract, perhaps, but little attention, has the enchantment of Armida's gardens. There are moments when the soul, with a vague but irresistible yearning, seems anxious to burst its earthly bonds, and to identify itself with the great spirit of beauty which hovers over the world—moments when the desire to love is so imperious, when the soul so eagerly seeks communion with some other soul, that the being, whom at other times we have perhaps regarded as indifferent, suddenly becomes the idol to whom a heart is offered as a sacrifice. The halo of mysterious feelings is around that being's head, and we mistake it for the luminous glory which encircles the Chosen. Just as the feeling of the moment sheds its lustre over a common-place scene, will it make an idol out of a common-place person.

How many fatal mistakes in love are attributable to such illusions?

Marmaduke and Violet were both under the spell of such a feeling. Yet neither spoke; words were too imperfect to express what passed within them. He rolled his pebbles one after the other into the pool, with mechanical precision; she watched the broad advancing sea, and listened to its music.

Had he declared his passion at that moment, he would assuredly have been accepted; and the whole course of their lives would have been altered. But he paused; he "dallied with the faint surmise;" he played with his own heart, and waited for her to break the silence.

But she kept her eyes upon the advancing sea, and a sigh, a gentle sigh heaved her bosom, for by some accidental association the current of her thoughts had become changed: she ceased to think of Marmaduke, and was communing in spirit with her departed mother. Perhaps it was the dash of the waters on the shore which brought back to her recollection those days of her unhappy childhood, when having lost her mother, she was wont to sit upon a rock, and hear the ocean speak to her

wild words of comfort. There were voices in the waves then; and those voices faintly sounding through the past, spoke to her mysteriously now. The image of her dear, kind, much-loved mother, stood before her. A tear rolled over her cheek; and Marmaduke, whose attention had been attracted by her sigh, looked up and saw it. His heart was proud, for he thought that sigh and that tear were for him.

“What are you thinking of?” he tenderly asked.

She turned her full large eyes, glistening with grief, upon him, and said gently,—

“My poor mother!”

And again her eyes were fixed upon the sea.

Marmaduke was hurt; and with a movement of impatience resumed his pebble rolling. His self-love shrank, offended at this unexpected avowal, and he mentally reproached Violet with her coldness.

“She loves me not,” he said. “Will she ever love me? Am I wasting my affections here as I wasted them before? Well, she

shall see that I can be as cold and proud as herself."

In this frame of mind he remained seated by her side, making no attempt to withdraw her from the reverie in which she was indulging, and with the sullen bitterness of a lover, refusing to enter upon a conversation which would have dissipated all his doubts, and made him the happiest of men.

Julius and Rose having finished their collection of shells, and having immensely enjoyed each other's society, though not a word of love had crossed their lips, came up to the rock and found the silent lovers not unwilling to prepare for the ride home. As they all four walked to the spot where the servants were with the horses, Marmaduke took Julius by the arm, and falling a few paces in the rear, said hurriedly,—

"Julius, laugh and joke as much as you please, but if the warning does not come too late, take care of your heart!"

"Explain, explain."

"Do not trust yourself—do not believe that

you can read a woman's heart from her behaviour — do not make the mistake I have made."

He refused to be more explicit, but Julius fancied he comprehended his meaning. With a truly human *naïveté*, Marmaduke imagined that as *he* had been deceived, his friend would likewise be so; and in perfect sincerity he counselled Julius not to believe in Rose's manner, because Violet's manner, as he supposed, had been deceptive to him.

To another the advice would have been idle; to Julius it was agitating, and confirmed him in his natural backwardness to believe a woman could fancy him: a backwardness which Rose's manner had of late so far overcome, that he had been several times on the point of declaring himself, and would I dare say have done so during their ride home, had not Marmaduke's earnest warning held him back.

Violet, pensive and sad, rode home occupied with her own thoughts; Marmaduke at her side scarcely making an observation. Rose, as

gay and fascinating as before, noticed a change in Julius, but said nothing to him about it, as she suspected love was at the bottom.

"I have finished my third reading of Leopardi's poems," she said presently, "and like them more and more. Their constant sadness is a great charm to me—I suppose, because having no sorrows of my own, I love to indulge in imaginary woes."

"Yes," he replied, "tears were given to man to purify him. So natural is sorrow to us, that if we have it not, we invent it; the heart would dry up and wither, if it were not watered by the blessed fountain of pity. But Leopardi's sorrows were in excess, and became a mental disease. Smitten as he was in body, heart, and mind, by disease, slighted love, and scepticism, no wonder that his poems are melancholy."

"Was he then slighted in love?"

"He loved—loved twice—but each time the offering of his heart was rejected. What else could the poor hunchbacked, crippled poet, expect?"

“If he was a cripple, was he not a great poet? If his back was ill-shaped, was not his mind noble?”

“His *mind!*” replied Julius, with a tinge of bitterness.

“Yes,” she said, “his mind: could not a woman appreciate that?”

“Women can appreciate a mind, but they cannot love it. Love springs from sympathy, not from intelligence: its seat is in the heart, not in the reason. A woman might therefore have admired Leopardi; but she could not love the cripple.”

“Yet, did not Mademoiselle d’Aubigny marry the cripple Scarron?”

“To become Madame de Maintenon,” replied Julius.

“I would cite a dozen other instances. Do you know, Mr. St. John, you are very ungallant in your opinion of our sex—which sex you can know very little about, to judge from your exaggerated notion of our regard for beauty. We like to keep the beauty to ourselves. As for me, I would as soon marry a

hunchback as a guardsman, as far as the mere beauty is concerned."

A strange joy filled his heart as she said this, and he was about to declare himself, when Meredith Vyner called to him to ride forward and admire a little valley which lay to their left. Rose fell back and joined her sister. The rest of the ride was performed in threes, instead of in couples. As they reached home, Vyner made his favourite quotation :—

Heu ! heu ! quantus equis, quantus adest viris
Sudor !

And conducted Mrs. St. John into the drawing-room. Marmaduke, Violet, and Rose, followed them. Julius went into the study to write a note.

CHAPTER VII.

BOLD STROKE FOR A LOVER.

Ah, cruel ! tu m'as trop entendue !
Je t'en ai dit assez pour te tirer d'erreur.
Eh bien ! connois donc Phèdre en toute sa fureur
Je t'aime !

RACINE.—*Phèdre.*

“ Do you never sing, Mrs. Vyner ? ” asked Mrs. St. John, as she saw her beating time with her head (and curious time it was !) to Violet's singing.

“ No ; I have so little voice.”

“ That surprises me ; I should have thought you must sing well, your speaking voice is so soft.”

Mrs. Meredith Vyner smiled her acknowledgments, and redoubled the energy of her

impossible time-beating. Marmaduke, charmed by the magic of Violet's singing, was gradually overcoming his anger, and was slowly admitting to himself what a divine creature she was.

She ceased, and Marmaduke prayed so earnestly for her to continue, that she again sat down, and while her rich contralto notes were making every chord in his heart vibrate, he suddenly encountered the savage gaze of his former "tiger-eyed" mistress. She rapidly closed and then opened her eyes, with that manner peculiar to her, and which I have mentioned before, and a smile dethroned the look of hate which the previous instant had usurped her face ; but he marked the change, and smiled scornfully.

"What a beautiful voice she has !" said Mrs. St. John.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Vyner ; " but we prefer Blanche's singing—she has so much *feeling*. Violet, you know, has more of the professional mechanism ; but Blanche has a soul in her singing."

As Blanche was a rival out of the way, it was safe to cry up her attraction, especially at the expense of one of the other girls. Violet was perfectly aware of what her mother meant, but she was not the less nettled. As she was about to commence another song, Mrs. Vyner said,

“There, my dear, that will do ; you have displayed your accomplishments quite enough, and it is unnecessary for Mr. Ashley to listen to any more songs sung out of tune, however curious the ornaments may be.”

Mrs. Vyner must have been very irritated, to have made a remark so plainly and directly disparaging and unkind !

“Did you notice that I sang out of tune, Mr. Ashley ?” Violet quietly asked.

“Not at all. In fact, as far as I may be allowed an opinion, I should say your intonation is remarkably perfect.”

“Well, I am glad you are not so severe a critic as mama,” replied Violet, with a calmness which was horribly exasperating, “because, as she cannot distinguish one tune from

another, her ears are so delicate that it is difficult to keep in tune to them."

This sarcasm, in answer to the petty spiteful remark which called it forth, produced an uncomfortable silence, which Violet broke by beginning Paisiello's magnificent *Ho perduto il bel semblante*, which she sang with triumphant energy and steadiness, showing how little the ignoble squabble had disturbed her.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner was pale with hate, but the twilight covered her paleness. In her rage at Violet's haughty sarcasm, and jealousy at seeing Marmaduke so enraptured with her, she resolved upon a diabolical resolve: she would regain Marmaduke's love, and break Violet's heart!

Meanwhile Julius was in the study writing this epistle:—

"Dearest Rose, I can no longer restrain myself, I can no longer hesitate and live in doubt. I love you. You must know it; and what you said not an hour ago makes me bold. Do you remember your words, 'As

for me, I would as soon marry a hunchback as a guardsman, so far as beauty is concerned.' They were sincerely spoken, were they not? At any rate 'upon that hint I speak,' and conscious of my own unattractiveness dare to hope my ugliness will not be a barrier to your affection. Do not ridicule my presumption, I entreat; look on it as an unhappy passion, which your own confession has urged me to declare. Even now I dare not tell you to your face I love you; partly because I still fear the avowal might distress you, and partly because the courage I shall need to bear with a refusal, would desert me.

"Examine your own heart calmly, and if it tells you that you could be happy with me—if it tells you that the devotion of my life would make up for all the superior attractions, mental and physical, in which I am deficient—then, as you come down to dinner to-day, bring in your hand the volume of Leopardi, and place it on the table. By that token, which can have no significance to others, I shall learn that I am not scorned. If your

heart does not speak in my favour, the mere omission of this will tell me too plainly, but in the least cruel manner, that I have made a sad mistake."

This was folded up into a tiny note, and with it Julius marched into the drawing-room to seek some means of delivering it. He found Rose playing with Shot, and stooping down to join her in that play, he easily contrived to slip it into her hand, just as the lamp was brought in. She blushed deeply, and her little bosom panted with hurrying feelings; but making an effort she ran out of the room, declaring it was time to dress for dinner.

She read the letter with intense eagerness, and finished it twice before she could make out distinctly anything beyond the delightful fact that Julius had at last declared himself. On calming her agitation a little, and deliberately reading the letter once more, she felt a certain impatience at that passage which attributed the declaration to what she had said during their ride. For the first time, it then struck her that she had given him too

broad a hint. Aware of his backwardness, and of his exaggerated notion of woman's desire for beauty, she was anxious to undeceive him on that point, and now saw that she had, perhaps, overstepped the bounds of maidenly reserve.

Now Rose, though a darling little girl, was not without her imperfections; and wilfulness was among them. She would do and say strange things, because she *chose* to do and say them; but you were not to draw any absolute conclusions from them, you were not to hold her to her words unless she also chose to be held to them; she called that taking an advantage of her. In the present case she was very anxious to tell Julius that she loved him; she had gone so far as to tell him that his want of beauty would be no disqualification; yet when he availed himself of her words, and "spake upon that hint," she rebelled, and was impatient at such an advantage being taken of her "unguarded language."

Meanwhile, the dressing-bell had rung, and no one was in the drawing-room except Marmaduke and Mrs. Meredith Vyner, who were

in the midst of a somewhat bitter and mutually reproachful conversation respecting the honesty and constancy of the two sexes.

“Men are so brutal,” she said; “they always demand undying constancy from us —”

“And never get it ——”

“And even when perhaps jealousy, anger, or despair have driven us into seeking elsewhere for relief from our outraged affections, they sneer and talk of our frivolity and incapacity for an enduring passion.”

“Well, well, it is easy to talk of jealousy driving a woman to extremity, but there must be shown some cause for that jealousy. Mere *absence*, mere inferiority in position, is *sometimes* enough to suggest ample cause for jealousy. An absent lover thinks incessantly of his mistress; a rich old lover makes his appearance; whereupon the engaged lady suddenly becomes jealous of her absent swain, and, *driven to desperation*, marries the rich old lover!”

Nothing could better please Mrs. Vyner than the turn taken by the conversation, which, in its generality of expression and covert significance,

best answered her purpose of justification, without seeming to justify herself.

“I agree with you. There must be ampler cause shown. But if the absent lover suddenly ceases to write, and reports arise that he is very assiduous in his attentions elsewhere, if to this silence, confirmed by these reports—if to the jealous rage, which those who love ardently must feel when they are betrayed, be added the temptation of vengeance in the shape of a brilliant match, then, I think, we should not blame a woman’s inconstancy, so much as we should pity her fate. Were she to marry a young and handsome man, she might be supposed to love him ; but if, as in the case supposed by you, the new lover be old, then it is a proof that whatever wild motives may have prompted her wild act, inconstancy in her affections had nothing to do with it.”

Marmaduke was a good deal shaken by this artful speech, but he rather felt than saw its falsehood. A shrug of the shoulders, and a slight incredulous laugh was all the answer he vouchsafed.

“There is this further difference,” she pursued, “between the sexes. When a man has quarrelled with a woman—when he has deserted her or been deserted by her, he tramples down in his heart all former love, and replaces adoration with hate, or, at the least, with indifference.”

“Very right too.”

“Yes, you men think so. But how differently a woman feels ! Under the same circumstances, whatever may have been prompted by her rage or her despair, the act upon which she had resolved once performed, her love returns with all its former force—returns and lives in her heart throughout the rest of her life. This is what I mean by our superiority in constancy. When once we love, it is for ever. No neglect, no ill-usage, no inconstancy can kill it. Weak and wayward, reckless and passionate as we are, we rush into wretched extremes, we do rash things when blinded by our tears, but do what we will, we cannot stifle the love that is in our hearts.”

The little creature had risen and thrown

back her golden locks with the graceful fury of a Pythoness, her eyes sparkled with an unwonted light, her nostrils were dilated, her whole frame seemed animated with passion, as she declaimed, rather than spoke, that vindication of herself in her sex.

I have said before that she had the nature of an actress. The present scene, therefore, was not only adapted to her histrionic display, but gave her such keen delight, that she could have pursued it for a long while, quite independent of any ulterior purpose, had not Marmaduke suddenly arrested her eloquence, by asking in a tone of subdued irony,—

“And am I expected to believe all this?”

She paused to fix a passionate look at him. Then, slowly drawing from her bosom a small locket, held it up to him, and said scornfully,—

“Do you recognise *this*?”

Before he had recovered from his astonishment, she had left the room.

“Good God!” he exclaimed. “It is my hair!”

It was her father's.

CHAPTER VIII.

W O M A N ' S C A P R I C E .

Quelque raison qu'on trouve à l'amour qui nous dompte,
 On trouve à l'avouer toujours un peu de honte.
 On s'en defend d'abord ; mais de l'air qu'on s'y prend
 On fait connoître assez que notre cœur se rend.

MOLIERE.—*Tartuffe*.

WE left Rose pondering over her lover's letter, and her own uneasiness at having by her hints called forth a delightful declaration. We return to her after the lapse of half an hour, and find her in the same state. At length the dinner-bell rings.

The volume of Leopardi lies on the table: will she take it down with her?

There is a fact in human nature which will be familiar to many, but which I am unable to

explain, and that is the occasional impulse which forces us to act diametrically opposite to our wishes. It is a sudden spasm of wilfulness, wholly irrational, but wholly irresistible. I know that, in my own case, I have refused advantageous offers—declined invitations to pleasant excursions—entirely in obedience to this impulse of wilfulness—which I have regretted the instant afterwards, when either circumstances or my pride made the regret unavailing. No reason, no gratification of any vanity, indolence, or temper has been at the bottom of this. The impulse has been purely wilful and irrational—motiveless, were not the motive enveloped in the very impulse.

I call attention to this fact, as a fact, because it helps me to explain Rose's sudden resolution not to take down the volume of Leopardi. Perhaps, in her case, there may have been some acknowledged influence derived from her annoyance at that passage in Julius's letter, which threw the onus of the situation upon her. Perhaps she might have been secretly anxious to show him that she was not so ready

to throw herself into his arms as he might suppose. I know not how it may be; all I know is, that with a sudden effort she walked down stairs, came into the drawing-room, saw the death-like paleness of her miserable lover, whose hopes had been thus scattered by a blow, seated herself upon a *vis-à-vis*, and joined in the conversation as if nothing had occurred.

It is easy to say that Julius was prepared for this, that his own diffidence had perpetually taught him to expect it; he had thought so, too, and yet he was *not* prepared. We sophisticate with ourselves quite as much as with others. We say we are prepared for an event which, if it occurs, takes us with the suddenness of a blow to a blind man. And Julius, when he saw Rose enter without the token, felt as if a grave had suddenly yawned at his feet. "Marmaduke was right!" he said, and instantly turned over the leaves of the "Book of Beauty," which was on the table.

Marmaduke, whom we left bewildered at the discovery of Mrs. Meredith Vyner's long-

cherished affection, had not yet recovered from the agitation into which it had thrown him. The announcement that Mrs. Vyner was too unwell to descend to dinner—having been seized with one of her singular hysterical fits—added to the tumult of his thoughts; for he readily divined the cause of that fit, and her wish also not again to meet him that evening.

It is needless to say, how gratified he was. In his own eyes he had been rehabilitated. From the position of a jilted lover, he was raised to that of one loved, “not wisely, but too well;” and the keen delight it gave to his self-love was something quite indescribable.

From a sort of instinctive feeling of delicacy, he kept away from Violet's side. Rose occupied him entirely.

Julius was, therefore, enabled to hand Violet to dinner without any embarrassment. He was cold, grave, and dignified; speaking little, but that little without bitterness, without covert allusions. You only noticed that he was grave—not that he was hurt.

Rose was somewhat piqued. She knew that she had done wrong, was sorry that she had done it, but yet could not without impatience see the dignified reproof which there was in Julius's manner. Willing enough to repair by a word the error she had committed, she expected, indeed required, that he at least should show sufficient concern to induce her to repair it.

This is not very amiable, perhaps, but it is human nature. In a moment of capriciousness, she had rejected his proffered love; not that she meant to reject it, but simply because she chose to indulge her wilfulness. She intended to release him from despair, as soon as her rejection had produced it; she had never thought of his leaving the house that evening, without a full assurance of her love. But now all her plans were overthrown. He exhibited no despair. His cold, grave manner was more like a stern reproof of her capriciousness, than the despair of a lover. Her rejection had been accepted; and she was angry with him for taking her at a word.

Violet was puzzled at the little attention Marmaduke paid her, and more puzzled at his eyes never meeting hers as they were won't, to mingle their lustre with each other; and observing also the change in Julius, she began to speculate on the probable cause. Was Marmaduke suddenly smitten with Rose, and was Julius jealous of him?

It was a solemn, tedious dinner. Fortunately, Meredith Vyner had begun upon the inexhaustible subject of English etymologies, and talked enough not to observe the silence of the others. When the ladies withdrew, he entered into a discussion with Marmaduke, on the comparative merits of ancient and modern poetry, while Julius carefully cut some apple peel into minute slips.

They remained much longer than usual over their wine; and when they returned to the drawing-room, Julius missed the sweet glad smile of welcome with which Rose greeted him, by studiously looking another way.

The change of feeling in a loving heart is

very rapid from anger to sorrow, and Rose had long since lost all sense of pique, for one of sorrowful alarm. During the time the gentlemen had remained over their wine, she had reflected on the whole affair, and penitently avowed her folly. Her only course was to undo what she had done; and the smile with which she greeted him was meant as the first intimation of her changed opinion.

But Julius neither saw that smile, nor afforded her the slightest opportunity of speaking to him; and—strange contradiction in human impulses!—the more he wrapped himself in his reserve, the more abject was her humility in endeavouring to draw him out of it.

At length she fled to her own room, resolved to bring down the Leopardi, and hand it to him, saying,—

“There is the book you ought to have had before dinner.”

But when she reached her room, she was forced to vent her pent-up feelings in a flood of tears—and bitter-sweet those tears were:

bitter in remembrance of the past, sweet in anticipation of the future. Having calmed herself by "a good cry," she had then to wash her face and eyes, to remove all traces of her grief. This took some little time.

When perfectly satisfied with her appearance, she took up the volume, kissed it fervently, and tripped down stairs. She found Violet alone leaning her magnificent arm upon the table in an attitude of profound meditation.

"Where . . . where are . . . they?" Rose faltered out.

"The St. Johns? Gone this quarter of an hour."

"Gone!" exclaimed Rose in an agonized voice, and sank into a chair, with a terrible presentiment of some tragic results from her absurd caprice.

CHAPTER IX.

CONSEQUENCES.

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean—
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

TENNYSON.—*The Princess.*

A RESTLESS, agitated night was it for the four lovers. Julius sat up packing. He had informed his mother of his rejection; and she, doating as she did on her son, was highly indignant at Rose's "unfeeling coquetry, which she never could have believed her guilty of." Espousing his cause with a vehemence which somewhat hurt him, she readily agreed to his proposal of their both leaving the Grange forthwith, and spending the winter in Italy.

Marmaduke also packed up that night. He had quarrelled with Julius, and was determined to quit the Grange early in the morning. The subject of their quarrel had been the two girls, whom Marmaduke accused of being heartless coquettes, which Julius angrily denied. High words passed; for both were in a state of extraordinary agitation, from the events of the night.

Having completed his arrangements, he threw himself upon his bed, but not to sleep. Strange visions came to him—phantasmagoria, in which the image of the imperial Violet was ever and anon floating before the passionate figure of the sylph-like Mrs. Vyner, as she last appeared to him, proclaiming woman's undying love. Gradually his thoughts settled more and more upon the latter. He began to consider the various parts of her story, and to compare it with the facts. Then a new light broke in upon him. It is one of the effects of oratory, that your ears are charmed, your mind borne away along the stream of eloquence or argument, without having time to pause and exa-

mine ; but subsequent reflection often suffices to break the spell, and the enthusiastic applauder votes against the very sentiments he has applauded. So Marmaduke had been carried away by the skilfully constructed tale which Mrs. Vyner had improvised ; and the plausibility of the non-receipt of letters, and reports of his attentions to another, had been so great as really to have made him doubt the justness of his old convictions. But, on reflection, that plausibility vanished. He remembered that his letters had been received and acknowledged until within a very short time of the announcement of her marriage. He also remembered that he had been so occupied with affairs as to have had no time even for ordinary society in Brazil ; so that no innocent flirtation with any girl there could at that time, by any possibility, have given rise to the reports by which she pretended to have been made jealous.

It was evident, therefore, that she was deceiving him again. For some purpose or other, she was playing with him.

“I will get to the bottom of this mystery,” he said. “One of two things it must be: either she really loves me, in spite of all—and, in that case, I will profit by it,—or else she is again coquetting with me for some purpose, or out of mere love of coquetry; and, in that case, I will avenge the past. She is as cunning as the devil! To dupe her, I must feign the dupe.”

He turned upon his pillow with a chuckle of triumph.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner slept soundly that night. A smile was on her lips as she sank asleep—a smile of gratulation at the success of her experiment on Marmaduke. She was sure that he was in her power.

Rose could only stay her grief by the recollection that to-morrow would explain away all that was now doubt and misgiving. She intended to call early at the Grange, and frankly tell Julius that she loved him. Nevertheless, in spite of this resolution, a dark presentiment overshadowed her soul, and drove away the thoughts of happiness. She wept

abundantly; sometimes at her own folly, sometimes in anger at Julius, for having so brutally taken her at her word, as if a woman's negative was ever to be taken, when looks and words had so often affirmed what was then denied. He ought to have known she was only teasing him; that it was only a spurt of caprice. He must have known it. But he did not choose to see it. He wanted to make her unhappy! A fresh flood of tears closed this tirade. And so on, throughout the long and weary night.

Violet having heard from Rose the real state of the case, was relieved from jealousy only to be plunged into fresh doubt. What could be the meaning of Marmaduke's conduct? They had not quarrelled. She had said nothing to offend him; nor did he seem offended; and yet

For the first time, Violet now became distinctly conscious that she loved Marmaduke. His fearlessness, manliness, and frankness had early captivated her,—to say nothing of his handsome person. Increased intimacy had shown her, as she thought, a heart and mind

every way worthy of her love. But a certain mistrust—perhaps a recollection of her inclination towards Cecil, perhaps a vague sense of imperfect sympathy with Marmaduke—had kept her more reserved than was her wont; and this reserve was attributed to haughtiness. The chance of losing him, however, awakened her to a conviction of what the loss would be.

Day dawned; and with the dawn Julius set out for London. Marmaduke followed, at about nine o'clock. At eleven, Rose and Violet called in the carriage at the Grange.

“Mrs. St. John is gone to Walton,” said the butler.

“Is Mr. Julius at home?”

“Mr. Julius is gone to London.”

“To London?”

“Yes, miss; he went early this morning.”

Rose sank back in the carriage, too overcome to weep.

“Is Mr. Ashley within?” asked Violet.

“He’s also gone to London, miss.”

It was evident that they were both deserted

by their lovers. They drove back in horrible silence.

After luncheon, they again called at the Grange—Mrs. St. John had gone out for the day. The next day they called—Mrs. St. John had gone to London.

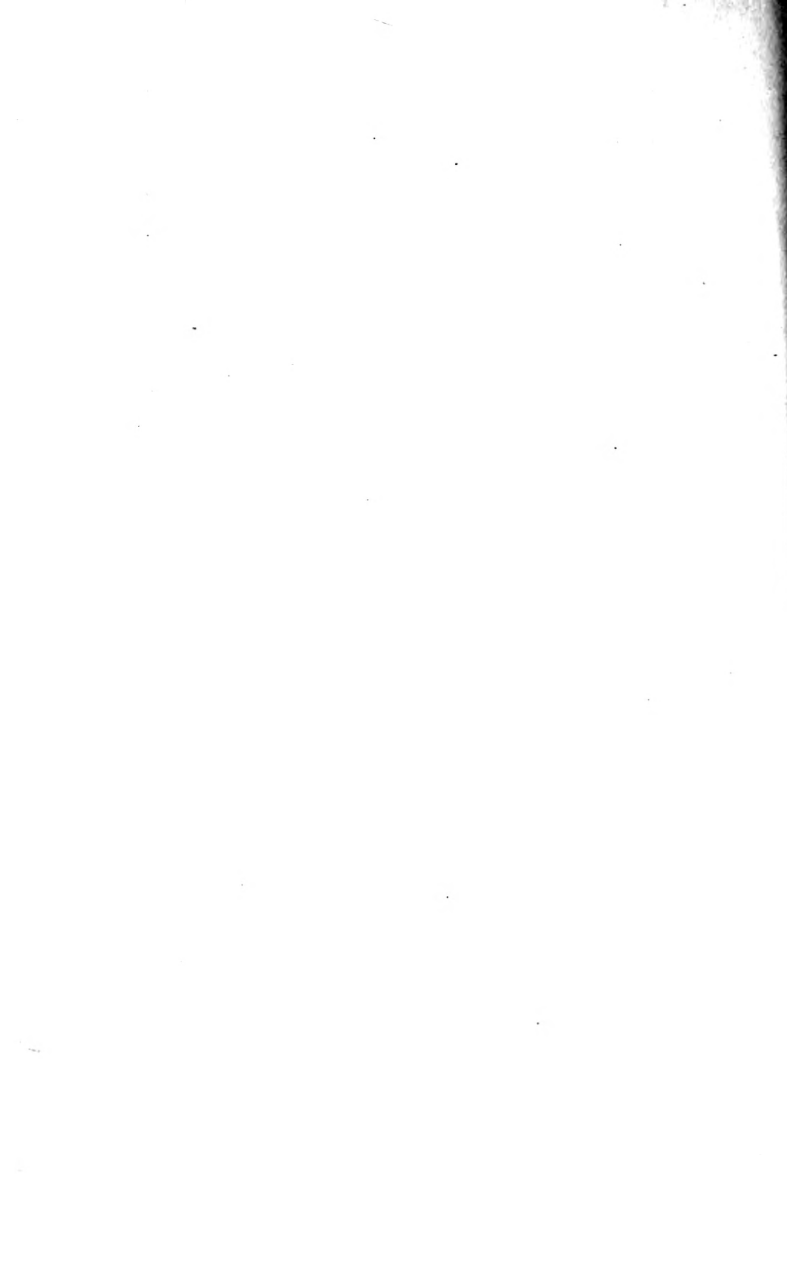
It would be painful to dwell on the sufferings of these two girls. Wounded pride, wounded love, baffled hope, and wearing doubt were the vultures consuming their hearts.

The next morning's post relieved some of Violet's fears, by bringing her father a letter from Marmaduke, apologizing for not having called to take leave of a family from whom he had received so much kindness, and with whom he had spent such happy hours; but being forced, by his quarrel with Julius, to quit the house at the very earliest, he trusted the omission of a farewell visit would be excused; the more so, as the Vyners were themselves very shortly to come to London, when he hoped to do himself the pleasure of paying them his respects in person, and in person to thank them for their hospitable kindness.

This proved that he at least had not departed in anger. Mrs. Vyner secretly rejoiced at the event, attributing his flight to a sudden resolution to quit her dangerous presence, and attributing the letter to an uncontrollable desire to be with her again.

To Rose this brought no consolation. She had none, except that she must see or meet Mrs. St. John in London, and that she could then explain to her the whole affair.

How eagerly these three women longed to be in London, and with what feverish impatience they set out, when the day at length arrived.



BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOARDING-HOUSE.

Mathew. Now trust me you have an exceeding fine lodging here, very neat and private.

Bobadil. Ay, sir: sit down, I pray you. Master Mathew, in any case possess no gentlemen of our acquaintance with notice of my lodging. Not that I need to care who know it, for the cabin is convenient; but in regard I would not be too popular and generally visited as some are.

BEN JONSON.—*Every Man in his Humour.*

RETURNED from their honeymoon, Blanche and Cecil began to look about them, and examine the state of their prospects. Her father had refused, as we have seen, to countenance the match; so that from him neither patronage nor money could be expected. Cecil called upon several of his influential

friends, to see if any "gentlemanly situation" was open to his acceptance. I need not say how fruitless were those applications.

Yet "something must be done," he constantly observed. A wife was a responsibility which made him serious; and despairing of—for the present at least—obtaining any consulship or government office suitable to his pretensions, he determined to make a name in literature or art. That name would either be the means of enriching him, as an admiring public enriches a favourite, or else would give him a greater "claim" on patrons.

Cecil was vain and ambitious, and from his boyhood upwards had been desirous of creating for himself a reputation equal if not surpassing those whose names he heard sounded in every society. But, although he was very clever and unusually accomplished, he had as yet taken no serious steps towards that lofty object. He wanted that energetic will which must nerve every man who attempts to do great things; "to scorn delights and live laborious days." He was unequal to the per-

petually-renewing sacrifice which lies at the bottom of all great achievements in art, literature, or science; the sacrifice, not of one temptation, not of one advantage, but of constant temptations. The artist is as one who, spending day after day in a luxuriant garden, must resist the temptation of culling the flowers that grow to his hand, of fruits that glisten before his eyes, and subduing the natural desire of man for instant fruition, consent to pass by these temptations, and, with spade and hoe, proceed to that work which, after much stedfast labour, much watchful care, will in due season produce fruits and flowers equal to those around him. The delight of seeing his labour crowned with such results; of watching the nursling of his care thus growing up into matchless beauty, is a delight more rapturous than the enjoyment of all the other fruit could have given him. But, nevertheless, that delight is purchased by a sacrifice of present small enjoyments for future pleasures of a higher kind; and the sacrifice of the present to the future is that which ordi-

nary men are perhaps least able to accomplish.

Cecil wanted the animal energy and resolution necessary for empire over himself. Much as he wished for reputation, he could not nerve himself to the labour of creating it. He was conscious of a certain power, and flattered himself that he could at any time succeed, whenever he chose to make an effort. But he could not make the effort. Parties of pleasure could not be refused; pleasant books could not be left unread; concerts and musical societies could not be declined. In short, one way and another, he "never found time" to devote himself to any work. There were so many "calls upon his time;" he had so many engagements; his days were so broken in upon.

Thus had he gone on idling and dreaming; coveting reputation, but shrinking from the means; dissipating his talent in album sketches, fancy portraits, album verses, and drawing-room ballads. His sketches were greatly admired; his verses were in request;

his music was sung; and everybody said, "How amazingly clever he is! What he *might* do, if he chose!"

But now poverty came as a stimulus to exertion. It was now a matter of necessity that he should work; and with cheerful confidence he sketched out the plan of his career.

His first step was to advertise in the *Times* for board and lodging on moderate terms, as their income was too small for an establishment of their own; and Blanche had never been initiated into the mysteries of housekeeping. To judge from the number of answers he received, one would imagine that a certain class of the English people were bitten with a singular mania—that of taking houses "too large for them," and the consequent desire "to part with the upper portion" to a genteel married couple, or a quiet bachelor. Why will people thus shirk the truth? Why not say at once that they are poor, and want their rent and taxes paid?

Well, among these answers there was one

which particularly struck Cecil. It was from a widow living at Notting Hill. Omnibuses passing the door every ten minutes ; the quiet, unpretending comforts of a home ; strictest attention to the respectability of the inmates, and sixty pounds a year for a married couple's board and lodging, were the inestimable advantages offered to the advertiser. The situation and the terms so well suited Cecil's present position, that he determined to look at the place.

The boarding-houses of London are of every possible description ; from splendour to pinching, almost squalid poverty. That kept by Mrs. Tring was a type of its class, and merits a fuller description than I shall be able to give of it. The first aspect of it produced a chill upon Cecil. He had taken Blanche with him ; and on arriving they were shown into the front parlour, with the information that Mrs. Tring would be "down directly."

It must be a beautiful room, indeed, which can be agreeable in such moments. I know few things more unsatisfactory than that of

waiting for a stranger in a strange house. But the cold, cheerless, rigid, poverty-stricken appearance of Mrs. Tring's parlour, would at all times have made Cecil uncomfortable : how much more so now that he was contemplating living there ! The drab who officiated as maid, with flaunting cap-ribands, slip-shod feet, and fiery hands,—a synthesis of rags and dirt,—came in to light the fire ; a proceeding which only made the room colder and more uncomfortable than before, besides the addition of smoke.

The parlour had a desolate appearance. All the chairs were ranged in order against the wainscot, as if no one had sat in them for months. Not a book, not a bit of needle-work, not even a cat betrayed habitation. The settled gloom seemed to have driven away all animated beings from its prosaic solitude. The furniture was old, dingy, scrupulously clean, invalided, melancholy ; it did not seem as if it had been worn to its present dinginess, but as if it had darkened under years of silence and neglect.

The Kidderminster carpet was of a plain, dark pattern, selected for its non-betrayal of stains and dirt; it was faded indeed, but in nowise worn. The hearth rug was rolled up before the fender. In the centre of the room was a square table, covered with a dark-green cloth, on which some ancient ink spots told of days when it had been used. Six black horse-hair chairs with mahogany backs, and one footstool retiring into a corner—a portrait of a gentleman, executed in a style of stern art, dark red curtains, and two large shells upon the mantelpiece, complete the inventory of this parlour, which in Mrs. Tring's establishment was set apart for the reception of visitors, and those who came to treat with her for board and lodging.

The want of comfort of this room did not arise from its appearance of poverty so much as from its cold pinched look. It was a poverty which had no poetry in it—nothing picturesque, nor careless and hearty. Between it and the parlour of poor people in general, there was just the difference between a woman

dressed in a silk dress which has been dyed, then has faded, and is now worn with a bonnet which was once new, and a woman dressed in plain, common, but fresh wholesome-looking gingham, which she wears with as much ease as if it were of the costliest material. It had the musty smell of an uninhabited room, and the melancholy aspect of a room that was uninhabitable. A sordid meanness was plainly marked upon it, together with an attempt at "appearances," which showed that it was as ostentatious as the means allowed. It was genteel and desolate.

Cecil looked at Blanche to see what impression it had made upon her; but the mild eyes of his beloved seemed to have noticed nothing but his presence, which was sufficient for her happiness. It suddenly occurred to him, that the more wretched the appearance of his home, the more likely would Vyner be to relent when he heard of it; and this thought dissipated his objections to the place.

Mrs. Tring shortly entered, with very evident marks of having just attired herself to receive them. Her presence was necessary to complete the picture; or rather, the room formed a fitting frame for the portrait of the mistress.

Mrs. Tring was the widow of a curate, who, astounding and paradoxical as the fact may appear, had *not* left her with an indefinite number of destitute children. No: for the benefit of the Statistical Society the fact shall be recorded. Mrs. Tring, though a curate's wife, had never borne a child; she had been left penniless but childless. When I say penniless, I use, of course, merely a well-sounding word. The literal truth is, that although he left her no money, he had left her the means of earning a subsistence, by opening her house as one in which single ladies, single gentlemen, and married people could be lodged and boarded at a very moderate sum. The furniture was her own. Her boarders paid her rent, taxes, dress, and little expenses; and thus Mrs. Tring contrived to live, but not

without a hard struggle! It was barely a subsistence, and even that was precarious.

Her personal appearance was not pleasantly prepossessing. She was horribly thin: with a yellow withered face, which seemed to have been sharpened by constant struggles to gain farthings, and constant sorrows at disbursing pence. She wore a black net cap, and a black silk dress, white at the seams from age, the shape of which had outlived a thousand fashions, and taxed the most retentive memory to specify when it had been the mode. It was a low dress, and a piece of net fastened by a large brooch served to conceal her yellow shoulders.

In manner she was stiff, uneasy, and yet servile. She spoke with a sort of retention of her breath, and an intensity of mildness, as if she feared, that unless a strong restraint were exercised, she should burst forth into vehemence; she agreed, unreservedly, to everything said, as if, had she ventured to contradict a word, it would have infallibly betrayed her temper.

To her visitors she displayed all her amiability, and acceded to every proposition with such good-humoured alacrity, that terms were soon agreed upon. For the sum of sixty pounds per annum, payable monthly in advance, they were to have the back bed-room on the second floor, unfurnished, and their meals with the family: these meals to consist of a breakfast at nine, luncheon at one, dinner at five, and tea at eight.

"We live plainly," said Mrs. Tring, "but wholesomely; luxuries are, of course, out of the question, yet my inmates have always been satisfied."

"As I have not the slightest doubt we shall be," replied Cecil; "I like simple food. What other inmates are there, pray?"

"The front bed-room on the second floor is occupied by an old gentleman who was in a government office, and is now living on his pension: a charming person, though a little deaf. The room next to his belongs to an Irish widow, a Mrs. Merryweather—I don't know whether you are acquainted with her, sir?"

Cecil smilingly replied, that he had not that honour.

“ I thought you might, sir ; she has seen a great deal of society, and is a very lively lady. In the room above hers, we have a Miss Bachelor, a maiden lady—very gifted, sir. She teaches music in some of the best families. The third back is let to a Mr. Roberts, a young gentleman in the city, who only breakfasts with us.”

Cecil bowed on receiving this information, which promised him that the fellow-boarders would, at least, afford some amusement to make up for the dreariness of the house. He announced his intention of taking up his abode there on the morrow. Accordingly, having moved what furniture he possessed, with some necessary additions, into the room he was now to call his own, and having hired in town a painting-room, which he fitted up for writing as well as painting, and moved his piano into it, he took his young bride to Mrs. Tring's house, and there they installed themselves,

with some merriment at the shifts to which the want of space forced them.

It was late in the evening when they took possession, and they preferred not presenting themselves to their fellow boarders until the morning.

"This is a sorry home to bring you to, dearest," he said, as the servant, having lighted his candles and asked if he had any orders to give, left the room.

Blanche twined her arms round his neck, and said tenderly to him: "Can that be a sorry home where love resides?"

"No, Blanche, no," he replied, kissing her forehead, "I was wrong. Love creates its own palaces; and we shall be as happy here, as if we had a splendid seat. We are starting anew in the world—it is well to start from low ground, because the smallest ascent has then its proper value. Here will I build myself a name that shall make you an envied wife."

"I am already enviable—ought I to wish for more?"

What a delightful evening they spent, ar-

ranging their property in the most convenient places, and then sitting over the fire discussing future plans radiant in the far-off sunshine of Hope. That little room—what a world it was! In the corner stood their bed,—in the centre a round table,—in another corner a small bookcase—by the window a toilet table. Nothing could be more cozy, they said.

O, 'tis a paradise the heaven of earth ;
Didst thou but know the comfort of two hearts
In one delicious harmony united,
As to joy one joy, and think both one thought,
Live both one life, and therein double life ;
To see their souls meet at an interview
In their bright eyes, at parley in their lips,
Their language kisses.*

* Chapman.—*All Fools*.

CHAPTER II.

INMATES OF A SUBURBAN BOARDING-HOUSE.

NEXT morning at breakfast Mrs. Tring's inmates assembled, and the new comers were duly introduced to their future companions. The breakfast was plain, and passed off rather uncomfortably, a feeling of restraint checking merriment. As the boarders descended one by one, and were presented to Cecil and his wife, an unanimity in commonplaces formed the staple of remark, and every one seemed unwilling to unbend before having closely scrutinized the new comers. Small communications respecting the state of the health, and of the good or bad night's rest, were confidentially whispered in corners; while daring

prophecies on the subject of the weather were more audibly pronounced.

Mr. Revell, the ex-official, ate in solemn silence ; Mrs. Merryweather, the lively Irish lady, was patronizing and polite ; Miss Bachelor, as demure as a well-fed cat ; Mr. Roberts, a dapper clerk with a rosy face and well-oiled hair, was the only person apparently undaunted by the presence of strangers, and rattled on with more confidence than wit, until the half hour warned him of the approach of his omnibus, when he buttoned his single-breasted frock-coat up to the neck, passed on to his red fingers a close-fitting pair of doe-skin gloves, rolled the silk of his umbrella into the smallest possible compass, and departed with the indelible conviction of being " about the neatest dressed man to be met in a day's walk."

Breakfast did not last long. Mr. Revell then engaged himself in assiduous study of the second day's *Times*, the only vestige of a paper which found its way into that forlorn place. Mrs. Tring departed to look after her

household concerns, leaving her boarders to their usual chat in the back parlour, until their bed-rooms were ready for their reception.

Mrs. Merryweather began to unbend, and Cecil feared that her liveliness might prove more tiresome than her reserve. She was a great talker of inconceivable small talk; launched upon the endless sea of personal reminiscence, she told stories with all the minute detail of a professed *conteur*, excited attention by the ample paraphernalia of an anecdote, and baulked it by ending without a point. Of all bores, this species is the worst: it is the bore obtrusive and inevitable. Other bores can, with some adroitness, be managed, they do not unchain your attention; but the story-teller fastens upon your attention by artful preparations, and though you have been disappointed a hundred times, experience is of no use, for your interest is involuntarily accorded on every succeeding occasion.

To escape from the torrent of talk which was

thus loosened upon him, Cecil sat down to the piano, and ran his fingers over the keys, after which he begged Miss Bachelor to favour the company with a taste of her quality. After the necessary hesitation and apologies, she sat down. From a teacher of music he anticipated a sort of railway rattle; but Miss Bachelor agreeably disappointed him by the modest execution of a sonata by Dussek: it was a mild, feeble, performance, unpretending as the performer, and infinitely preferable to Mrs. Merryweather's stories. He then sang a duet with Blanche, then a solo, and then another duet. This concluded, he observed that Mrs. Merryweather had retired, and he followed her example.

"I can't say much for our society," he said to his wife, as they went out for a stroll.

"We shall not see much of it, you know. We have our own room," replied Blanche.

"True; but while I am at work?"

"I can think of you!"

There was no reply to this, but to press the

arm that leaned on his, closer to his side, and to look fondly in her loving face.

During their walk, they discussed their plans again with that inexhaustible interest which the future always has to the young and struggling; and they returned to dinner with a good appetite.

A significant smile was exchanged between Mrs. Merryweather and Miss Bachelor, and then between the ladies and Mr. Revell, as a handsome piece of ribs of beef was placed upon the table. Cecil noticed it, but failed to comprehend its meaning. He observed also that the hostess carved, and would by no means consent to his relieving her of the trouble; a procedure which the exiguity of the single slice placed upon each plate fully explained.

"May I trouble you for a little horse-radish?" he suddenly asked.

Mrs. Merryweather and Miss Bachelor—astonishment snatching up their eyebrows—simultaneously ceased eating. Mr. Revell, whose deafness prevented his astonishment,

ate on. Ask for horse-radish ! There was something bewildering in the very extravagance of the expectation.

In silence, they awaited Mrs. Tring's reply.

"Horse-radish !" said that lady, with intense suavity. "Dear me ! how very forgetful of me. But we never eat it ourselves ; and it never occurred to me that you might like it. Very forgetful ; very forgetful, indeed."

"Pray, do not say a word about it. I care very little for it—only a matter of habit."

Emboldened by this audacity in the newcomer, Miss Bachelor ventured to think she could eat another cut of beef. Mrs. Tring, scowlingly, and in the most repressed tone, suggested the propriety of keeping a corner for the second course ; to which Miss Bachelor assented, now fairly unable to conceive the immensity of the revolution which the appearance of the Chamberlaynes had created. A second course ! Visions of pheasants—perhaps even grouse—darkened her bewildered brain.

Mr. Revell, as usual, had heard nothing, but sent up his plate for a second help; to all Mrs. Tring's shouts about "keeping a corner," imperturbably answering, "Yes, rather well done; and a bit of fat."

Mrs. Merryweather remembered how on one occasion she was dining at Colonel James's who had married an old schoolfellow of hers, the daughter of the man who for so many years kept the What's-the-name hotel in Jermyn Street, where the Polish count stayed so many weeks, and was so like Thaddeus of Warsaw, only his name was Winsky, and he came from Cracow, and about whom there was that tragical story; how one night as he was walking down Regent Street, when he was suddenly felled by a blow on the head, and was taken senseless to his hotel. It was a most extraordinary occurrence, and excited a great deal of talk at the time; but Mrs. Merryweather could not at that instant remember the exact circumstances. But, however, that was neither here nor there. What she was going to say was, that her old school-

fellow had married Colonel James—quite the gentleman—and often invited her to dinner; very good dinners they were too; plenty of wine and delicacies of the season—peas when they first came in, and all that sort of thing; well, one day—she never could forget it, live as long as she might—she had eaten so plentifully of the first course, a delicious saddle of mutton, that when the game arrived—she had not anticipated game—she was scarcely able to touch it; and Colonel James, with his usual affability, observed, “Ah, Mrs. Merryweather, you should have kept a corner for the second course.”

This thrilling anecdote being ended, the beef was removed. Cecil was not a little amused when he saw that an apple pudding constituted this famous second course. But as, in the memory of man and boarder, no precedent for such an extravagance as pudding with hot meat had been known at Mrs. Tring’s, the ladies were quite satisfied that such a second course should appear at all. The only misgiving in their minds, was

whether such cheer was to become habitual; or was it simply an illusive and treacherous display for that occasion only?

A Dutch cheese followed the pudding, and there the dinner terminated.

Accustomed as Blanche and Cecil had been to the luxuries and refinements of their station, it may be supposed that this ignoble boarding-house was very repugnant to them, and that they suffered bitterly from the change. It was not so, however. Change is so pleasant to every human being, that, provided it be abrupt and striking enough to produce a vivid sense of contrast, it is eminently agreeable. The man who most enjoys a well-appointed table, whose pride it is to have his dinners served with the care and splendour bestowed upon banquets, will also enjoy "roughing it," and picking the leg of a fowl with no fork but his fingers, no plate but a hunch of bread. We like from time to time to feel ourselves superior to conveniences, superior to our wealth and its advantages.

The change was quite abrupt enough to make Cecil and his wife enjoy it; and on retiring to rest that night, they were as happy as affection could make them.

CHAPTER III.

HAPPY LABOUR, HAPPY LIFE.

Si modo dignum aliquid elaborare et efficere velint, relinquenda conversatio amicorum et jucunditas urbis, deserenda cetera officia, utque ipsi dicunt, in nemora et lucos, id est, in solitudinem recedendum est.

TACITUS.—*De Oratoribus.*

THE splendours of the first day were never renewed. Exhausted munificence sank quietly back into ancient close-fistedness. Mrs. Tring had given one banquet, but every day was not to be a holiday, as Mrs. Merryweather and Miss Bachelor mournfully confessed, when, on the succeeding morning, they found themselves returned to the salt butter, drenched tea, and implacable coffee, from which they had been one morning released. Still more dolorous

was the aspect of the dinner. A return was made to the primitive allowance of one potato for each person, and the bread was as stale as before.

Cecil was of course chary of making complaints, but as he could not eat salt butter, quietly contented himself with dry toast : a proceeding which gained him the respect of Mrs. Tring, as it saved just so much butter. It was an ill-advised act, however, as it gave her the courage to make several other petty retrenchments—too petty for him to speak about—yet, nevertheless, annoying. He had not been there a fortnight before he determined on not staying beyond the three months for which he had taken his room. Having thus made up his mind that the annoyances were but temporary, he was enabled to bear them with tolerable stoicism.

Mrs. Tring had to make a living out of her boarders, and as she accepted such very low terms, the reader may imagine what nice calculations and minute economies were necessary. The house was, indeed, a field of battle,

wherein, by adroit generalship, she every day gained a victory. The living was pitiable, and Cecil was forced, in self-defence, to keep a small provision in a store closet, from which he and his wife satisfied the appetite which Mrs. Tring's fare had stimulated, not appeased. It sometimes went so far as his sending out for a chop, which he cooked in his little room, over his dwarf fire. Nevertheless, with all the extra expenses into which scanty fare forced him, the place was remarkably convenient from its cheapness; and they both supported the little discomforts with happy light-heartedness.

Cecil was full of projects. He had begun a picture of considerable pretensions, the conception of which was not without grandeur: it was Nero playing while he gazed upon the blazing city of Rome. He had also sketched the libretto of a comic opera, of which he was to write both words and music. Gay and lighthearted as the hopeful and employed always are, the best qualities of his nature were brought out, and Blanche adored him, if possible, more than ever. Work—which was given

to man that he might learn to know his excellence, and to know the pleasure which attends the full development of every faculty—work crowded the hours with significance, and gave to life a purpose; and Love illumined with its sunshine the difficult path which stretched itself before him. Never, no never, had Cecil known happiness till that time. He had squandered the riches of his nature as he had squandered the heritage of his parents; and now he came to know the value of what he had lost. A serious ambition occupied him, a happy affection blessed him.

Oh! who shall paint the luminous picture of their quiet life, which, to ordinary eyes, was so prosaic and insignificant! In that miserable house, where meanness hourly struggled with adversity, there was a small room, which was parlour, bed-room, and sometimes kitchen, all in one; and from the contemplation of which, when you were told that in it lived a pair who had been reared in luxury and refinement, you would have turned away with painful pity. Yet were the secret history of that seemingly

unfortunate pair known, your pity would change into envy, as those four miserable walls changed into a temple of Love, Youth, and Hope.

Poverty—a word of terror—is only terrible to the rich. The poor are not really the unhappy, for happiness is wholly independent of our worldly goods and chattels. If poverty has its hardships, wealth has its annoyances. If wealth can satisfy caprices, when satisfied they do not give the same delight as the cheap enjoyments from time to time indulged in by the poor. All things are precious in proportion to the difficulty of obtaining them, and the very facilities of wealth take from enjoyments their zest.

What makes poverty terrible is its proximity to want. And as want itself is often a thing of degree, the rich imagine that any deprivation of their accustomed indulgences must necessarily be a serious evil. But, in truth, the human mind is so constituted as to adapt itself to every condition, and to draw from its own health the requisites of happiness.

Blanche and Cecil were poor, but they had visions of future wealth and prosperity; meanwhile they had the glorious certainty of mutual affection, which irradiated their humble home, and made each hour of their lives worth more than all Peru could purchase.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW MRS. VYNER WAS BENEFICENT.

ONE morning while Cecil was in his studio, smoking a cigar and contemplating the sketch of his picture on the easel, with the air of a man who profoundly meditates on the details of a great conception, Blanche was in her room at Notting-hill, making the essence of coffee with a French machine, which they had purchased (unable to drink the incomprehensible mixture Mrs. Tring set before them) when a carriage drove up to the door. Blanche did not hear it, as her room was situated at the back. It was with great surprise, therefore, that she saw her mother and Rose rush into the room, and bound into her arms.

After the first hearty embraces and inqui-

ries were over, Blanche became aware of the condition in which she was found, and blushed. It was not that she herself felt ashamed of her poverty, but she was hurt at the reflections which must necessarily arise in their minds respecting the folly of her marriage; so she hastened, in rather a precipitate and clumsy manner, to assure them how exquisitely happy she was.

“Thank God for that!” exclaimed Mrs. Meredith Vyner. “Then I have nothing to reproach myself with for not having interfered—for not putting a stop to Cecil’s attentions—which I very early noticed, let me tell you. The only thing I now desire is to bring your papa round; but he is *so* obstinate! I do my utmost—but I almost begin to fear that my intercession only makes him more resolved; and I suspect if we were never to mention the subject to him, he would relent very speedily. But depend upon me, my dear, for looking after your interests.”

“Dearest mama!” said Blanche, gratefully kissing her.

“As soon as I see him relenting, I will contrive to throw him in your way—and you can then manage him yourself—but do not attempt to see him till I give you the word.”

“I will be guided by you.”

Rose was unusually grave and silent. Blanche noticed it, and noticed also that she looked ill.

“I have been unwell,” Rose said; “but I am getting better now. A slight fever, that is all.”

“And how is Marmaduke Ashley?” asked Blanche.

“Very well; we saw him yesterday; in fact we see him very often now,” Mrs. Vyner answered; “somehow or other he has always some commission to execute for one of us, and as he is an agreeable companion, we make much of him.”

“And how gets on the flirtation with Violet?”

“Why—pretty much as usual. I suspect it is only a flirtation just yet; or else he is kept at a respectful distance, for you know

dear Violet is not the most affable of beauties."

"And Julius, Rose, how is he?"

"Indeed, I cannot tell you," quietly answered Rose.

"You can't! What! do you mean to say, Rose, that——."

"He is in Italy, I believe," she said, interrupting her sister, but showing no more emotion on her face than if she were speaking of the most indifferent person.

Blanche was not deceived, however; she knew her sister's love for Julius, and divined a quarrel.

"That is the slight fever!" she mentally exclaimed; and then comparing her lot with that of her two sisters, felt it was infinitely preferable.

After a two hours' chat, they rose to depart. The real purpose of Mrs. Vyner's visit was to give Blanche fifty pounds, which her father had sent her, in accordance with the arranged plan that she was to suppose it came from her mother.

“And now before I go, dear Blanche,” said Mrs. Vyner, “I have to give you an earnest of your not being forgotten by me, however your father may act. Money from him, he vows, is out of the question; he will not give a sixpence. But out of my own privy purse, I shall from time to time take care of you. There, dear girl, take that;

The gift is sma', but love is a'.

I have set aside this fifty pounds——”

She was interrupted by Blanche throwing her arms round her neck, and hugging her tightly, while tears of gratitude stood in her eyes, and she murmured “Dearest, kindest, mama!”

Rose, who was equally taken by surprise at this *coup-de-theatre*, also sprang up and kissed her mother, exclaiming,—

“Oh! I wish Violet were here!”

Mrs. Vyner understood the wish, and looked delighted.

“One day,” she said, with the meekness of a martyr, “she will learn to know me.”

It was an exciting scene. Blanche and

Rose were affected, as kind hearts always are at any action which bears the stamp of kindness; and Mrs. Vyner was affected, as most people are when they have done a generous action, with a certain inward glow of noble pleasure.

For do not suppose that she remembered at this moment whence the money actually came. Not she. In her excitable mind, the means were lost in the end. She had given the money, she had aroused the gratitude of the two girls, and as far as her feeling of the matter went, she felt just as if the money had been hers. Indeed, so truly was she possessed with this idea, so actually generous did she feel in that moment of excitement, that on opening her purse to take out the notes, she found another ten-pound note beside it, really her own, and taking it also out she said as she presented it,—

“There, you may as well have that too—you will find plenty of use for it—and I shall not miss it. There. Only be happy, and trust in me.”

The sudden impulse which led her to do this—to complete as it were the action which she had begun with such applause—to redouble the effect of what had already been created—will be understood by all who have known, and knowing have analyzed, such characters as Mrs. Vyner; to others it will appear a gross inconsistency.

CHAPTER V.

THE CURSE OF IDLENESS.

Or fia dunque giammai, che tu, Ozio, possi esser grato veramente, se non quando succedi a degne occupazioni. L'ozio vile et inerte voglio, che ad un animo generoso sia la maggior fatica, che aver egli possa, se non gli rappresenta dopo lodabile esercizio e lavoro.

GIORDANO BRUNO.—*Spaccio.*

THE consequences of this little scene were manifold.

“Papa,” said Violet to her father on the following day, “you have done what I knew you would do, and what I accept as a presage for the future.”

“And what is that, my dear?”

“Sent Blanche some money.”

“Who told you so?” exclaimed he, greatly surprised.

“ I divined it,” she answered, with a quiet smile.

“ You . . . you are mistaken, Violet, . . . I send . . . I have renounced her.”

“ Yes, but your heart speaks for her in secret, and in secret you send money. Though I question whether sixty pounds . . . ”

“ Fifty,” interrupted her father.

“ Oh, then, you did know of it ? ” she said, archly.

Meredith Vyner bit his lip.

“ Sixty was the sum Mama gave, at any rate, because Rose, who was present, told me so.”

“ Kind, generous creature ! ” ejaculated Vyner. “ She must have added the other ten from her own purse. Violet, you have guessed aright, but keep the secret, unless you wish me to withhold even my underhand charity from your wretched sister.”

Violet promised to do so ; but how great was her scorn of her mother’s hypocrisy, when she thus found her suspicions verified ! From her knowledge of her father and mother, she

had at once guessed the real state of the case, and confusedly, but strongly, suspected the motive of the latter.

This was the way in which their mutual hatred was nourished. Violet was not a dupe, and her mother saw that she was not.

On Cecil, the influence of this gift was fatal.

“This comes most fortunately,” he said; “for not only do I now begin to see that our income is barely sufficient to meet our scanty expenditure, but the more I advance in my ‘Nero,’ the more am I impressed with the necessity for not hurrying it. All great works demand time and labour. Were I to hurry the execution I should spoil it, and too much depends upon success for me to be precipitate.”

He was sincere in saying so; he was his own dupe in asserting that what he most needed was ample leisure in which to elaborate his conception. He caught at the excuse offered to his idleness, and like all men, covered his weakness in the imposing folds of an

aphorism. The brain is singularly fertile in inventing plausible reasons to excuse weaknesses.

Labour is a sublime necessity: it is beneficence under a rude aspect. But although so beneficent to man, it is radically antipathetic to his nature. All men are *constrained* to work. Poverty or ambition are the invariable taskmasters, and it is only by dint of the strong stimulus of want, or the stronger dictates of indomitable will, that human nature, vagabond as are its tendencies, can be made to persevere in the tasks set before it.

What wonder, then, if men under all conditions avidly seize upon every occasion which enables them for a moment to escape from the tyranny of work? What wonder if this weak, wayward, susceptible Cecil, who had laboured cheerily under the impulsion of necessity, now forgot the sweet delights of his daily task, and relapsed into his old habits of dreaming idleness?

There was no longer any remarkable hurry. His daily existence did not depend upon the immediate accomplishment of his task. He

could wait, he could mature his plans, he could work only when the inspiration came to him ; there was no need to harass an unwilling brain, he could bide his time. To any one who knew him, it would be easy to foresee that from the moment he was released from the immediate necessity of labour, his time would be frittered away in sterile efforts. It is only genius, which, goaded by an irresistible inward impulse to transmute into art all that it has felt, labours with courageous love, and sings because it cannot choose but sing. Talent of every kind needs an external stimulus, and Cecil was a man of talent, not a man of genius.

Blanche confirmed him in his opinions ; partly, perhaps, out of sincere belief in him and in all he said, which made her think he could not be in error ; partly, also, out of a little egotism of love which made her rejoice in every hour that he could snatch from labour to spend at her side. He was so loveable, that she would deserve pardon, even if her sex's ignorance of life had not concealed from her the enormity of her fault. There was

something so caressing in his manner, that few people withstood it; and to her he was the perfection of tenderness, delicacy and amiability. Persons of his lively, susceptible organization, are usually fascinating in their manners—there is a *laissez aller* (which in him was tempered with perfect good breeding), a frankness, a gaiety, and a general consideration for the feelings and opinions of others, founded on a desire of universal approbation, which create more regard than great qualities in a less agreeable exterior. If he was charming to others, what was he to the wife he loved!

She wished to have him with her, and he was but too glad to gratify her wish. A little excursion to Richmond occupied one day; a visit to some Exhibition broke in upon another. There were always pleasant walks and satisfactory excuses. He was not idle, he said; his brain was working, his ideas were gradually becoming clearer; the details stood out more distinctly in his imagination; and ‘Nero’ would benefit by this delay.

The effect of alms is always enervating, how-

ever it may relieve a present want; and the contributions of Mrs. Vyner were a species of alms. This was the case with Cecil. His sense of independence—his healthy confidence in his own powers—becomes destroyed. Had Vyner made a distinct allowance to his daughter, it would have then formed a certain part of their income, and Cecil would have no more relaxed his efforts than he did when his own small but definite income was all he could rely on. But this uncertain charity—this indefinite alms-giving which Mrs. Vyner's first gift seemed to indicate, had the injurious effect of all unascertained indeterminate assistance: it made Cecil rely on it as on a fund.

In this mental analysis I am exhibiting motives in all their nudity, but the reader will not suppose that because I drag them into the light of day, they were as clear to Cecil, in whose breast they were enveloped in the sophisms and obscurities with which men hide from themselves their own infirmities.

As Cecil sat after breakfast smoking his

cigars, and watching the graceful involutions of the clouds he puffed before him, he honestly believed that he was not wasting his time. Because he occasionally arrested his wandering thoughts, and fixed them on his plans for 'Nero,' or for his Comic Opera, he fancied he was maturing them. He mistook reveries for meditation. And because in those hours of pensive idleness he made but trifling progress in the elaboration of his plans, he imagined that elaboration must necessarily be slow, and demanded more time. Thus his very infirmity was alimanted, and each day's error only made the original mistake more plausible.

Who has indulged in all the enchantment of the world of reverie, wherein materials are so plastic, and triumphs are so easy,—when man seems to be endowed with the god-like privilege of creation, and his thoughts take shape without an effort, passing from the creative mind into the created act, without the hard obstacle of a medium,—who is there, I say, that, having known such intellectual triumph,

has not felt humbled and discouraged when, descending from the region of reverie and intention, to that of reality and execution, he has become aware of the immensity of labour, of hard resolute labour to be undergone before he can incarnate his ideas into works? The unwritten poems—the unpainted pictures—the unnoted melodies are, it is often said, transcendently superior to those poems, pictures, and melodies which artists succeed in producing. Perhaps so; but the world justly takes no account of unaccomplished promises, of unfought victories. What it applauds is the actual victory won in earnest struggle with difficulty; the heroes it crowns are those who have enriched them with trophies, not those who *might* have done so. ✓

But Cecil was content to dream of victory—to “dally with the faint surmise” of beauty—to plan, to hope, to dream—but not to act. He would stand before his easel, looking at his canvass, or playing listlessly with the colours on his palette, but never boldly using his pencil; and because “ideas” did not come to

him in that irresolute mood, he threw the palette down, lighted a cigar, and declared himself unfit for work that day.

He then would seat himself at the piano to try if Euterpe were more propitious. His fingers running over the keys would naturally suggest to him some melody that he liked; it was played, of course, or a fragment of it—then another fragment; then he began to sing—his voice was good, and it pleased him to hear it. In this way another hour or so would pass, and he would then take up his hat and stroll out. Day after day was this miserable farce of “awaiting inspiration” played with the same success.

Enthusiastic artists and critics will assuredly award him their esteem, and proclaim him a genuine artist—a real genius—when they hear that Cecil had a profound contempt for “mechanical fellows,” who sat down to their work whether under “inspiration,” or under the mere impulse to finish what they have begun. He was really eloquent in his scorn of the “drudges.” Genius, in his eyes, was a divine

caprice. It came and went in moments of excitement: a sort of intermittent phrenzy. Being a scholar, he entirely approved of Plato's theory to that effect, as developed in the dialogue of *Ion*. The business of an artist was consequently to await those moments, and then to set himself to work, when his soul was stung to ecstasy by overpowering visions of beauty.

There is, in the present day, an overplus of raving about genius, and its prescriptive rights of vagabondage, its irresponsibility, and its insubordination to all the laws of common sense. Common sense is so prosaic! Yet it appears from the history of art that the real men of genius did not rave about anything of the kind. They were resolute workers, not idle dreamers. They knew that their genius was not a phrenzy, not a supernatural thing at all, but simply the colossal proportions of faculties which in a lesser degree, the meanest of mankind shared with them. They knew that whatever it was, it would not enable them to accomplish with success the things they

undertook, unless they devoted their whole energies to the task.

Would Michael Angelo have built St. Peter's, sculptured the Moses, and made the walls of the Vatican sacred with the presence of his gigantic pencil, had he awaited inspiration while his works were in progress. Would Rubens have dazzled all the galleries of Europe, had he allowed his brush to hesitate? would Beethoven and Mozart have poured out their souls into such abundant melodies? would Göthe have written the sixty volumes of his works,—had they not often, very often, sat down like drudges to an unwilling task, and found themselves speedily engrossed with that to which they were so averse?

“Use the pen,” says a thoughtful and subtle author, “there is no magic in it; *but it keeps the mind from staggering about.*”^{*} This is an aphorism which should be printed in letters of gold over the studio door of every artist. Use the pen or the brush; do not pause, do not trifle, have no misgivings; but keep your mind

^{*} Essays written during the intervals of business.

from staggering about by fixing it resolutely on the matter before you, and then all that you *can* do you *will* do: inspiration will not enable you to do more. Write or paint: act, do not hesitate. If what you have written or painted should turn out imperfect, you can correct it, and the correction will be more efficient than that correction which takes place in the shifting thoughts of hesitation. You will learn from your failures infinitely more than from the vague wandering reflections of a mind loosened from its moorings; because the failure is absolute, it is precise, it stands bodily before you, your eyes and judgment cannot be juggled with, you know whether a certain verse is harmonious, whether the rhyme is there or not there; but in the other case you not only *can* juggle with yourself but *do* so, the very indeterminateness of your thoughts makes you do so; as long as the idea is not positively clothed in its artistic form, it is impossible accurately to say what it will be. The magic of the pen lies in the concentration of your thoughts upon one object. Let your

pen fall, begin to trifle with blotting-paper, look at the ceiling, bite your nails, and otherwise dally with your purpose, and you waste your time, scatter your thoughts, and repress the nervous energy necessary for your task. Some men dally and dally, hesitate and trifle until the last possible moment, and when the printer's boy is knocking at the door, they begin : necessity goading them, they write with singular rapidity, and with singular success ; they are astonished at themselves. What is the secret ? Simply this ; they have had no time to hesitate. Concentrating their powers upon the one object before them, they have done what they *could* do.

Impatient reader ! if I am tedious, forgive me. These lines may meet the eyes of some to whom they are specially addressed, and may awaken thoughts in their minds not unimportant to their future career.

Forgive me, if only because I have taken what is called the prosaic side ! I have not flattered the shallow sophisms which would give a gloss to idleness and incapacity. I have

not availed myself of the splendid tirades, so easy to write, about the glorious privileges of genius. My "preaching" may be very ineffectual, but at any rate it advocates the honest dignity of labour; let my cause excuse my tediousness.

CHAPTER VI.

A SKETCH OF FRANK FORRESTER.

These are the arts, Lothario, which shrink acres
Into brief yards—bring sterling pounds to farthings,
Credit to infamy; and the poor gull,
Who might have lived an honoured easy life,
To ruin and an unregarded grave.

Beaumont and Fletcher.

CECIL was rattling away on his piano one afternoon, fancying he was composing, when the door opened, and in walked a gentleman enveloped in a pea-coat, whom Cecil saluted warmly as Frank Forrester; and after endless questions and vociferous laughter on both sides, they both sat down to indulge in rapid biographical reminiscences from the time of their last meeting.

Frank Forrester was, in every sense of the

word, a man about town. He was tall and well-made, and when young must have been handsome. Although not yet forty, he looked much older, from the effects of constant debauchery. You could not look at him without misgivings. His well-shaped head was bald from the forehead to the crown, and this baldness he vainly endeavoured to conceal by carefully combing the thin long hair over it which grew at the sides, and which he allowed to grow very long for that purpose. I don't know why, but there is always something particularly unpleasant in this endeavour to conceal baldness: it is a subterfuge which deceives no one, but which is resented as an attempt to deceive. In Forrester's case, perhaps, there was mingled a disagreeable conviction that he was too young to be bald in the ordinary course of things; and those thin straggling hairs were all that had withstood the midnight fevers and the morning headaches of his reckless life. His deep-lined brow and finely arched eyebrows surmounted two light greenish-grey eyes, not unlike those

of a fox in expression. A dark rim, encircling those eyes, spoke plainly in confirmation of the bald head, and was further strengthened by the sallow complexion, stained by a hundred orgies. His mouth was large, (the upper lip adorned with a manly moustache carefully trimmed and combed,) and displayed teeth which a shark might not have disowned. His nose was high and haughty—curved like those of the race of Israel—a nose that commanded the other features, and which sounded like a trumpet when he blew it.

He was dressed in a style, which, though heterogeneous in its details, had a certain homogeneity of effect. A black-satin stock, the falls of which were united by two enormous turquoise pins chained together; a blue pea-jacket, such as only sailors formerly permitted themselves, covered his frock-coat. Very staring plaid trousers, cut gaiter-wise, to fit tight over the instep of his *bottes vernies*, completed his attire, if we add yellow kid gloves, and a resplendent gold and crystal mounted cane made out of the sword of a sword-fish.

This somewhat slang costume was worn in such a manner that it did not seem slang. Forrester had the "air of a gentleman," which carried off more perilous things than his costume. He looked, indeed, something of a blackleg ; but it was the nobleman turned blackleg.

Frank Forrester was not exactly a leg, he was rather a sponge. Not over scrupulous in borrowing money, he never directly cheated. To ask for a cool hundred which he was certain of never repaying, which, indeed, he never intended to repay, was not in his eyes dishonourable ; but to cheat at cards or dice was a crime with which he had never even sullied his imagination. The son of an undertaker, well to do in the world, he had been brought up as most boys are brought up, with a slight infusion of religion administered in weekly doses, and a wayering code of ethics enunciated and illustrated in a random and somewhat contradictory manner. When his father died he found himself at the head of a thriving business which he detested, and in possession

of a good round sum of money, which he did not class in the same category as the business. Gifted with a jovial and genial humour, great animal spirits, and the audacity of a *parvenu*, he very quickly "realized," *i. e.* disposed of the business, and began his merry career. While he was spending his money he made some acquaintances, and learned some experience, which enabled him, when all was spent, to turn his acquisitions to advantage, and make them support him. Like the noble spendthrift turned blackleg, he lost a fortune in acquiring the dexterity to gain one; or, rather, learned from those who sponged upon him how he could sponge on others.

Never was there a more agreeable sponge, and no wonder that affluent greenhorns, desirous of "seeing life," should be glad to see it under his auspices and in his company. It could not be too highly paid. It was well worth the champagne and cool hundred. If a young booby must squander away the hard won-earnings of a careful father, it was right, Frank said, that he should have some pleasure for his money,

and how was that pleasure to be obtained? By money? Not a bit of it! By science; and he, Frank, understood the science of spending, and “flattered himself that he did know how to make the hours roll swiftly and smoothly, provided any one were ready to grease the wheels.”

Frank knew everything, and could do everything, that a man about town is expected to know or do. He was unequalled at billiards, strong at whist and *écarté*, adroit at hazard, great in culinary and cellar knowledge, knew London as well as his alphabet, and, as he expressed it, could give the most knowing “a wrinkle or two on some point or other.”

One of his “wrinkles” is worth specifying. He was the first who ever got into parliament by the simple and ingenious procedure which has since had several imitators. He stood for a borough (which, for weighty reasons, shall be nameless), where he was an utter stranger. It was one of those admirable boroughs where the workings of our electioneering system are shown to perfection, since almost every voter had his price. So notoriously corrupt

was it, that one of the candidates unblushingly announced on his placards :—

*“ Electors ! Remember this : those who vote for
* * * will not go unrewarded ! ”*

It was a compact little borough, purchasable at a price not difficult to calculate. The astonishment of Frank Forrester’s friends, when they heard of his standing for * * * may be conceived. He replied that he was sure patriotism, pure unmixed British independence, was the thing voters wished for now-a-days. His placards were flaming with splendid sentences. His speeches were worthy of Cato of Utica. Not a man did he bribe ; not a drop of beer did he allow.

“ Lor, sir ! ” said an independent voter to him, “ it’s no use your standing if so be you’re not good for a drop o’ drink. We always expects a little, ’lectioneering time.”

“ My good friend,” replied Frank, drawing himself up, magnificent in virtue, “ you have utterly mistaken me. I scorn to influence any one. If my principles do not speak for me, I

am content to be rejected. If the voters are desirous of having a real representative—one who reflects their passions, echoes their prejudices, advocates their interests, and argues their causes—I am the man. If they want one who will buy their votes—whose hold is not on their convictions, but on their cupidity, I am not—I say emphatically, I am *not* their man!”

The baffled voter shook his head dubiously, and muttered, “Well, well, it won’t do, it won’t do;”

“It shall do!” majestically retorted Frank.

And it came to pass as the voter said, and as Frank said.

The returning officer announced that Frank Forrester, Esq., had obtained eleven votes.

“Electors!” said Frank, with imperturbable gravity, “I thank you for the confidence you have displayed.—(*A laugh.*) I repeat it—I thank you! You have returned my rival, and by an overwhelming majority—I hope your confidence there has not been misplaced. For myself, I still cherish the hope of one day

representing you.—(*Hear ! hear !* and cries of *Try the tin next time !*) Upon what do I found that hope ? Upon the sincerity of my principles ! You have witnessed how little I attempted to cajole or bribe you.—(*More fool you !* shouted several.) I have bought no man's vote.—(*Howls of contempt.*) Yet you have unsought, unbought, given me eleven votes. Electors ! on those eleven votes I build my hope—I may say, my certainty—of representing you. This imposing minority suffices my ambition.”

Only the eleven voters, to whom he had communicated his plan of action, and one or two of his special friends, appreciated the irony which was concealed by the magnificent buffoonery of this address. But the mystery was soon revealed. Frank petitioned against his antagonist's return. The upshot was, that the liberal briber — was convicted of corruption, his election annulled, and Frank, on the shoulders of his “imposing minority,” was carried into parliament.

Frank Forrester, as an M.P., was the tor-

ment of the whigs, who were never sure of his vote. Although, therefore, his name is not to be found in Hansard; although he neither made a motion, nor seconded one during the whole of his parliamentary career; times were so "ticklish," that his vote was of importance, and he made the most of it by never absenting himself from a division, and by the impossibility of parties calculating on which side he would vote. This power he converted into patronage, and many were the little clerkships and small situations which he was enabled to bestow on deserving young men; whether he was actuated by pure philanthropy towards the young men, or by a desire for the establishment of closer commercial relations with their parents, he never disclosed; but it was observable that the young men had invariably substantial ready money fathers, and that Frank was invariably more assiduous at chicken-hazard after those acts of well-timed patronage.

Frank belonged to a stylish club, and had a numerous set of acquaintances; but they

were almost exclusively males. A good fellow—a jolly dog—a knowing card—and a loose fish: those were the appellatives by which he was usually distinguished. He lived upon confiding young men, and an occasional turn of the wheel of fortune. He had always some new acquaintance—or rather, let me say, some inseparable friend, whom he introduced into the glories and pleasures of “life.” This friendship was inviolable as long as the young man’s property lasted; but as soon as the silly gull began to request repayment of loans, or to lower himself in his patron’s eyes, by retrenchment of his expenditure, then Frank was either called away from London for a few weeks, or discovered some splendid young fellow who really never allowed him a moment’s leisure. Frank seldom quarrelled with his victims—he wanted heartlessness for that: and he never “cut” them.

Frank had “formed” Cecil, and as, when completely formed, Cecil had gone abroad, leaving Frank with a richer pupil, no shadow had darkened their friendship; and on Cecil’s

return, he found the same jovial hearty manner, in spite of his dilapidated means. This convinced him of Frank's regard, and from that moment he had made him the chosen confidant of all his schemes.

CHAPTER VII.

CECIL'S FIRST FALSE STEP.

No man can be a great enemy, but under the name of a friend ; if you are a cuckold, it is your friend only that makes you so, for your enemy is not admitted to your house ; if you are cheated in your fortune, 't is your friend that does it, for your enemy is not made your trustee ; if your honour or good name is injured, 't is your friend that does it still, for your enemy is not believed against you.

WYCHERLEY.—*Plain Dealer*.

“WELL, Frank, and how goes the world with *you*?” said Cecil, after having made him acquainted with the present state of his affairs.

“Tollollish!” replied Frank. “I have an ingenious youth in training, who, I am sorry to say, is nearly trained or drained. Picked him up abroad—genus snob, very distinct! But snob’s money I find quite as available as any other. I was going from Verviers to Cologne

this summer, when in the deserted first-class carriage into which I ensconced myself, there stepped a flaxen-haired youth, of the unmistakeable "gent" style—the only real substitute for a "gentleman." He was soon after followed by a lathy boy, all skin and bone, with trousers either shrunk by washing, or considerably outgrown, and fastened with *immeasurable straps*. The swagger of this boy was worth money to see. He entered into familiar conversation at once, and favoured me with some biographical particulars, which were eminently trivial. At last he took out his cigar-case, and offering it to me, with an air of exquisite assumption said,—

"Do you do anything in this way?"

"Not so early in the day."

"Lord, it doesn't matter to me what's the time o' day, I'm always ready to blow a cloud, I can tell you."

"Indeed," said I, with perfect gravity.

"Oh, yes. Do try one. I dare say it won't disagree with you. It's all fancy."

"You seem to be a fast fellow."

"I believe you."

"Do you come from London?"

"No; I'm a Southampton boy. We do it in prime style there, I can tell you."

"Oh, you do?"

"Don't we, that's all!"

"Were those trousers built in Southampton?—they're devilish stylish—so uncommon, too!"

"Yes," replied the innocent youth, in all the verdure of his nature. "Yes, they were built at Southampton—but I don't call *them* anything—merely put on to travel in—you should see my fawn kerseys and my plaids!"

"What, better cut?"

"Oh, no comparison."

"I should like very much to have your schneider's address. I am going to Southampton on my return to England. I suppose if I were to mention your name ——"

"Lord, yes, that would be sure to do it. But he isn't a cheap tailor, mind you."

The "gent" was leaning his head out of window, nearly suffocated with suppressed

laughter, and from time to time encouraging me with fierce winks to proceed.

"There," said my lathy patron, "I have written his address on one of my cards—just show him my name, and you'll find it all right."

"Pray, sir," I asked, as if suddenly eager in poultry, "when you left Southampton, what was the price of a young goose?"

This was too much for the "gent," who burst out into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. The viridity of the Southampton youth was great, but this laughter opened his eyes. He coloured, and exclaimed,—

"Oh, you want to chaff, do you? But it won't do. I sha'n't bite. I'm not such a fool as I look."

"That's *very* possible—Heaven forbid you should be!" said I; whereupon a fresh burst of laughter from snob primus, who vowed that the youth was "sold."

At the next station, *lath* left our carriage; and "gent" instantly began expressing to me his delight at the way I had "sold the snob;"

which led to his becoming in turn communicative, and informing me that he had just "sacked a little tin," which it was his intention "to spend like a brick." From that moment I took him into my confidence. I have trained him. I have taught him how to dine—which he had once imagined consisted in eating what money could procure. I have taught him to live. He is no longer a snob; at least, he doesn't betray himself. But—and, damn my whiskers! this is the sad part of the business—it is the way with so many of them—now, just as he is becoming companionable, his purse is running low."

Frank sighed as he thus finished his tale, but quickly changing the subject, he said,—

"Come, let's take a turn, and look in at the club."

"No, Frank, I must work."

"Nonsense! What's the use of puddling all day over your work—you only stupify yourself. Come."

"There's some truth in what you say, I believe; the brain gets muddled by long appli-

cation. Yet my picture isn't half finished yet—half!—not a quarter.”

“Never mind; leave it for to-day. Damn my whiskers! I must have you to-day.”

Cecil's irresolution was soon conquered; he took his hat, and went out with his chum. They strolled down to the club, where Cecil had not shown himself since his marriage. The heartiness of his welcome greatly flattered him; he felt that he was a favourite; success cheered him; his spirits rose; he became unusually brilliant.

“You must dine with us to-day, Cis,” said Frank.

“Impossible, my dear fellow.”

“Don't know the word, Cis. I have said you dine with us—four—jolly party; and you dine: damn my whiskers!”

“But my wife——.”

“Well? Inestimable Benedict, you are not tied to her apron-string, are you? You have not submitted to the tyranny of the weaker sex? You are master?”

“I am; certainly I am; but——.”

"You have never dined from home before. You shake your head. Very well, now is the time to begin."

"My dear Frank, you must know me well enough to know that I should have no scruple in following my own wishes; and although I have not yet dined from home, I have no sort of fear that when I choose to do it, my wife will make a remark. But in the present case she will be alarmed—she has no idea of my coming down here. My hours have been very regular, and if I were not to present myself at five o'clock, she would be seriously concerned about me."

"Yes, yes, it's always by that unnecessary 'concern' that women begin. What the devil is there to be concerned about? The sooner you accustom her to the accidents of life—to the impromptu parties and unexpected absences—the smoother will your life be."

"When you are married, Frank, you can manage as you please, but for me your system won't do. I love my wife, and my constant care is to make her happy."

Frank looked at him with an indescribable mixture of astonishment, incredulity, and pity; then, as a thought seemed to occur to him said,—

“But look here, Cis, the thing is easy. Just scribble a line to tell her not to expect you, that you are dining at the club, and one of the men shall take it. Will that satisfy you?”

“Perfectly.”

“Then do it.”

Cecil wrote thus:—

“MY OWN SWEET PET!

“Do not wait dinner for me to-day, as I am forced to dine with some influential people at the club. But I shall hurry away as soon as possible, and be with you before ten. A hundred kisses.

“CECIL.”

The dinner was excellent, and the guests in high spirits. The “influential people” of whom Cecil spoke, were the great Frank himself, young Hudson (the youth in training and the amphytrion), and Tom Chetsom, jolly Tom

Chetsom. The wines were not spared; and by the time the smoking-room was sought for a quiet cigar and cup of coffee, to assist the slow elaborate digestion of those who had dined well, Cecil was in that peculiar state which I would christen moral drunkenness. He was not tipsy: nor near it. His walk was as steady, his eye as free in its movements, his vision as undisturbed as before dinner. But although neither in his gait nor conversation he betrayed the least influence of wine, yet within he felt a sort of torpor—the strong desire for a sensation which makes men reckless how they procure it, and which makes them passively adopt any plan likely to arouse them from the heavy deadening lethargy in which their faculties are enveloped.

The smoking-room soon became intolerable to him. He wanted movement—excitement. The theatre was proposed. They went. But the heat, the glare of the lights, the dazzle, and confusion of the whole place, made Cecil worse. They left the house.

“What shall we do?” said jolly Tom Chet-

som, as they stood under the portico of Drury-lane.

Hudson proposed the Coal-Hole ; but Frank reminding him that it was too early, he was distinctly of opinion that he should not go home till morning, till daylight did appear.

“I tell you what, Tom,” said Frank, “isn’t it one of Hester’s soirées to-night? Suppose we go there : she’ll be charmed to know Cis—he’s half a literary man, and wholly a painter.”

“Good idea!” said Tom. “Will you go Chamberlayne?”

“Anywhere. Let’s start.”

“Come along, then.”

And they drove to Cadogan-place.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE POETESS IN LONDON.

Quid enim dulcius libero et ingenuo animo et ad voluptates honestas nato quam videre plenam semper et frequentem domum suam concursu splendidissimorum hominum?

TACITUS.—*De Oratoribus.*

Le mariage se propose la vie, tandis que l'amour ne se propose que le plaisir.

BALZAC.—*Mémoires de Deux Jeunes Mariées.*

WHILE they are driving to Cadogan-place, let us cast a retrospective glance at the fortunes of the authoress of *Gleams and Glooms*, to whose soirée they are wending.

Hester Mason had achieved a part of her ambition: she held a salon in London. How she contrived and maintained that, would take long to narrate in detail, as it was only by

steady perseverance and admirable ingenuity she succeeded. On first eloping with Sir Chetsom, she had the tact never once to mention a settlement; indeed when he, in a moment of tenderness, alluded to the subject, she playfully put her hand upon his mouth and said,—“Oh, don't begin to talk of money, or I shall think you have *bought* me. You are not going to leave me, are you?”

“Leave you, Hester?”

“Yes, leave me. It looks like it. I am poor I know; but rich in *your love*. Make me independent, and you will think it no hardship for me to be left; it is always so with men!”

A sigh followed this. Sir Chetsom was ravished; the dupe was fooled to the top of his bent. Hester marked the effect, and from that moment knew her power. From that moment he denied her nothing. The time would come, she foresaw, when he would be completely her slave, and that was the time to make conditions.

Meanwhile, she impressed him with the notion of the necessity for their *liaison* being

hidden from the world. If people did not respect her, they would not envy him. If she were not something more than his mistress, he would be not better than the common herd of men who have their "follies." Appearances should be preserved for all sakes. Sir Chet-som admitted the truth of this, reserving to himself the privilege of disclosing his secret at the club, by intelligible hints and half-confidences.

He had given her a house; he had brought there the nucleus of a literary and artistic society. Hester received every Wednesday evening, and as her parties had a certain piquancy, they were well attended. The great difficulty was to get women. That is always the stumbling-block of an equivocal position. Men are willing enough to go anywhere, if they are amused, and to ask no questions, or at least to affect no prudery. With women, the case is wholly different. Accordingly, with what untiring perseverance do women in equivocal positions manœuvre to obtain the presence of virtuous women at their houses!

How they pet them, how full of delicate attentions and substantial kindness! What cajoleries, what adroit insinuations, what flattering prospects they set forth to dazzle their "dear friends"! What twaddle they will listen to for hours, with the eagerness of curious interest; what confidences accept! It is one of the most amusing scenes in the comedy of society to witness the grateful attentions of a woman who is not "received," to those of her female acquaintance who shut their eyes to her real position, or are ignorant of it. You see a pretty, lively, clever, graceful, dashing woman of the world exerting all her coqueties to cajole some ugly, stupid, awkward, underbred woman whose "countenance" she wants. She imagines that the presence of a few "modest women," no matter what their unattractiveness, will give her salon an air *comme il faut*. But it deceives no one. It only renders her salon a little less agreeable.

Hester managed, as others manage, to collect a few complaisant woman, and a man or two old enough, stupid enough, and respect-

able enough to keep them in countenance ; and she had a salon.

Sir Chetsom Chetsom was rich and lavish. Without asking for it, Hester contrived to have almost everything she wished for. His vanity, at first only tickled by the conquest, was now always alive to the maintenance of that conquest. She made him feel that his position was insecure : it was done delicately, but it was done. To the dread of being left by her in favour of another, was soon added the dread of losing her for her own sake. He had become accustomed to her. She amused him, occupied him, captivated him. When she pouted, he was in despair ; when she caressed him, he was in raptures. The old boy was alternately alarmed at her perception of the difference in their ages, and flattered at the conviction that, in spite of that difference, she really loved him. She was always playing upon two themes. First theme.—Why should I waste my youth and love upon a selfish old monster ? Second theme.—How infinitely preferable is the love of a man who has seen

the world, and lost the first illusions of youth, to the capricious tenderness of a boy!

Give those themes to a clever woman, and imagine the variations she would play upon them!

Although Hester had achieved a part of her ambitious plans, it must not be supposed that she was either satisfied or happy. She had kicked the dust of Walton from her feet. She was in the capital, and surrounded by luxury. She had a salon to which many celebrities were visitors. But neither Sir Chetsom nor her visitors could make *Gleams and Glooms* popular. Not a copy was sold. Not a journal of any standing took the least notice of it. Some exaggerated criticisms, bristling with notes of admiration, and sonorous with epithets of praise, did indeed appear; but they appeared in journals of no character, and bore the evident stamp of the puff direct. She sent a copy, with a flattering letter, to every author whose name rose above the herd into some distinction. From the majority, she received no acknowledgment; from a great

many came letters instantaneously acknowledging the "receipt" of the volume, but not a word on its contents; from some few poets she received general and vague flatteries, together with copies "from the authors" of *their* last new poems. A delicate attention, expressive of this golden rule—praise me and I'll praise you.

Having consoled herself with the conviction that the age was a prosaic age averse to poetry, she began a novel, hoping to gain celebrity by that.

In noting the latent causes of her dissatisfaction, I have said nothing of Sir Chetsom. That she was not happy, while forced to act the degrading character of mistress to such a man, will be understood; she used him as the ladder by which to ascend the height which beckoned in the distance; but she thoroughly despised him, and at times despised herself.

On the Wednesday evening chosen by Frank Forrester for the introduction of Cecil to the fair muse, Hester was looking particularly

well. A flush of animation gave a tint to her cheek, and additional fire to her dark eyes. In her raven hair a string of costly pearls were woven; large glittering bracelets encircled her well-shaped arms; and a black velvet dress set off to perfection her handsome bust, which was lavishly displayed. She was seated on the sofa propounding some humanitarian doctrine, when the four were announced. She rose graciously. Tom Chetsom apologized for the liberty he had taken in bringing Mr. Chamberlayne, who was very desirous of the honour, &c.

“Any friend of yours will always be welcome, Mr. Chetsom,” she said, smiling, “and Mr. Chamberlayne particularly so. I have often heard his name, and always accompanied by some flattering epithet.”

Cecil bowed.

Frank then presented Hudson, and Cecil noticed, that although she also received him with a gracious smile, there was a marked difference in her manner. Strange animals that we are! this flattered him exceedingly.

The rooms were full ; and conversation was lively in groups. It was a curious assembly when the details were examined, and had little of that *éclat* which Hester had imagined in her dreams. The men for the most part were neither young nor aristocratic ; they were—at least some of them—not positively unknown to fame ; small reputations, current only in literary circles—scarcely heard beyond those circles ; men of talent, men of worth, men of energy and of ambition, but scarcely at ease in society. Mixed with these were a few of Sir Chetson's club-men, a few harmless respectabilities, and a few—very few women.

One of these women was requested to oblige with one of her charming performances, and her harp was wheeled into the centre of the room. It is one of the penalties attached to the condition of such women as Hester, that if their dear female friends have any little accomplishment, they must be implored to exhibit it. In any other society, Miss Blundell would no more have been asked to perform, than Gunter's waiters would be asked to dance. But

to secure Miss Blundell, Hester could not avoid inviting her to play. If Hester wanted countenance, Miss Blundell wanted admiration. And it was really comic to see the mistress of the house threading the crowd of visitors, and entreating their attention to the fantasia with which Miss Blundell was about to favour them.

The hubbub of conversation was almost stilled, and Miss Blundell advanced to take possession of her harp.

“She’s ugly enough for a genius,” whispered Frank to Hester. Hester put her finger on her lip to command his silence.

Frank’s observation was just. Miss Blundell was not handsome. Of an age so uncertain that it is denominated a “certain age,” she wore her black hair in a girlish crop. On a low, square, rugged forehead sparkled a *Sévigné*. Wondering eyebrows overarched two sunken eyes; a graceless nose and insignificant mouth did *not* tempt an artist to fix them on his canvass. In accordance with the juvenility of her style, she was robed in white

muslin, displaying a scraggy tawny neck, fierce and protuberant shoulder-blades, and disreputable arms. Certainly nothing but great skill could exonerate such ugliness.

She began by a rattling sweep over the strings, and an audacious display of elbows. Having thus fixed attention, she paused and sought inspiration from the ceiling. Genius always does. I know not what mystic influence there may be in a white-washed *plafond*; but it appears there is something of the kind, since rhymes, tropes, and melodies are drawn therefrom. Miss Blundell found music there. A few seconds of silent invocation brought down the muse, and she flogged the harp into the Gustavus galop.

There are players of no feeling, and players of too much feeling. Miss Blundell was of the latter class. She despised execution (with some private reasons for so doing), and thought music should have a soul. Feeling was all in all with her, and feeling she threw into everything. Even this mad, giggling, joyous, whirling, rattling galop was not free from

her sentimental caprice. She began *con spirito*,—



which suddenly changed, at the fourth bar, from *allegro vivace* to an *ad libitum rallentando*, expressive of the deepest emotion, the player's eyes thrown upwards as if in rapt devotion. These notes,



died away in a “billowy ecstasy of woe,” immediately succeeded by a fiery *allegro*, which again subsided into a pathetic *rallentando*:



An ironical murmur of applause followed this display, and Hester pressed her hand as she thanked, complimented, and led her back again to the sofa.

“ Was it not charming ? ” she asked Frank, in a tone intentionally audible.

“ Amazing ! ” replied he ; then adding, in an under tone, “ she is the Orpheus of private life : as witness the effect she produces on the animals here. I hope she hasn’t turned the cream.”

“ You are a sad man—so satirical ! ”

“ Not I. Your friend delights me ; she’s original.”

“ Well, I am no musician myself ; but I believe she is.”

“ Yes, as cats are musicians.”

Hester laughed, and turned to Cecil ; but Frank instantly recalled her attention, by saying,—

“ Do tell me who is that old buffer leaning against the mantelpiece. Is it Miss Blundell’s brother ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Of course—I knew it—he *could* be nobody else’s brother. Do study him. He’ll do for your novel. Look at him, Cis. Observe that blue coat, is it not immeasurably,

audaciously, sublimely impossible ! The short waist, the large collar, like a horse-collar, the brass buttons, and scanty skirt ! When was it made ? In what dim remoteness of the mythic ages was it conceived and executed ? What primitive and most ancient Briton first wore it ? By Jove ! I must ask the address of his tailor."

" No, no, Frank, for God's sake, don't."

" Then the flaming shawl-waistcoat, the grey trousers strapped so tightly over those big many-bunioned feet, the eye-glass, the flower in his button-hole, the withered smiling face, the jaunty juvenility of this most withered individual ! Really, Miss Mason, you ought to make a collection from us all, for the privilege of seeing this unedited burlesque, this fabulous curiosity ! He is a mummy unembalmed !"

The drollery of Frank's manner was irresistible, and both Hester and Cecil were bursting with laughter, when the unconscious object approached them, and asked Hester whether some one else would not add to the harmony of the evening.

"I am quite sure," he added, with a gallant bow, "that to your numerous accomplishments you add the gift of song."

Hester excused herself.

"You look like a singer," said Frank to him with perfect gravity. "I see it in your manner. Is it not so?"

A withered smile and feeble shake of the head was Mr. Blundell's answer.

"Well, well, I suppose all the musical genius of the family is centred in your charming sister. What a player! What a touch—or rather what a pull!"

"Humph! yes, not bad."

"So much feeling! Feeling is the thing, sir. It is soul, passion, poetry. Feeling's the chap for me! A poet, sir?"

"No."

"You look like one."

"No; I am merely a dabbler. I follow in the wake of intellectual men. I have some humour. My friends think me a sort of 'Boz'—that certainly is my line. But I have no pretensions."

“Have you written much?”

“A good deal. I have written for ‘Blackwood.’”

“Indeed!”

“Yes; but they never printed what I sent them. I don’t know why. Perhaps, because I am not a Scotchman. They are very jealous of English writers. Had I been a Scotchman they would have jumped at my papers; so my friends tell me.”

“The scoundrels!” said Frank; but whether he meant the Scotchmen, or the friends, remains undecided.

“My friend Mr. Donkin, the celebrated epic poet, (the author of ‘Mount Horeb,’ you know,) thought my papers very funny, very; but ‘Blackwood’ actually rejected some poems of his, as well as a ‘Dissertation on the conditions of the Intellectual Epopæ.’ Do you write, sir?”

“Yes; letters.”

Blundell was puzzled. He could not from Frank’s manner detect whether this was a naïveté or a sarcasm.

“A very literary employment too,” said Cecil, “according to the landlady of one of my friends. He was looking at apartments in Brighton, and before concluding, he asked his landlady whether she had other lodgers?”

“‘Only one gentleman, sir,’ she said, ‘rather an eccentric gentleman. I suppose you know him, sir, it’s Mr. Shakspeare.’”

“‘I have not the pleasure of knowing Mr. Shakspeare.’”

“‘Don’t you, sir? *He’s the great writer!*’”

“‘Ah, the great writer!’”

“‘Yes; but lor, sir, *writer as he is*, he has only written two letters all the time he has been in my house!’”

Blundell laughed feebly, though a funny man—a sort of “Boz” his friends told him; he did not see the joke, but laughed because the others laughed.

At this moment Sir Chetsom Chetsom was announced. “How late you are!” said Hester, reproachfully; but she paid him no attention during the rest of the evening, and his manner to her was eminently respectful.

Cecil was amused. He conversed with some clever men, and was flattered by his own success; he was a really good talker, often brilliant, always amusing. Hester took a great fancy to him, and engaged him in several discussions on rather perilous topics for a young man and a young woman to discuss. In them Cecil felt uneasy. He was not on equal ground in talking to a young woman, and although she piqued him to continue, he felt himself at a disadvantage.

"You forget," he said at last, in the midst of an argument on marriage, "that I am a married man, and therefore cannot espouse your view."

"Truly, but why can you not? Because the present odious law of marriage is all in favour of the men."

"I demur to that."

"Men make the laws, and make them for their own advantage. Think of the gross injustice! Women must not only be rigorously pure, but must even be kept in ignorance as complete as watchfulness will admit of; but a man may have had a hundred low amours, and no

father refuses to give him a daughter. Purity, which is supposed to be woman's greatest virtue, is never thought of in a man. Why should not a girl demand that her lover be as pure as herself? Why should woman be hopelessly disgraced for that which in a man is venial? I know what you will say; but I repeat that marriage is an unholy institution. Think of the suicides committed by women who have been seduced; did you ever hear of the seducer shooting himself? Think of the wretched wives who have died broken-hearted, of the outcasts of society—outcasts for that which disgraces no man. What is it all owing to? the law of marriage! Beside the fearful crimes and desperate acts which the law of marriage causes, look at the thousands of young, healthy, affectionate girls, who wither in unblessed virginity, who never know the joys of maternity. And mark the glorious inconsistency of men: you keep us ignorant, you keep us from equal privileges, you shut us from the world of action, and your sole argument for it is, that nature has unfitted

us for it; that we are inferior creatures, whose organization is specially adapted to the bearing, rearing, and nursing of children; yet this, for which alone we were created, your barbarous law of marriage denies to a frightful number; wretched girls who wither in the hope of finding husbands."

"That the law of marriage," answered Cecil, "transmutes a desire into a crime is very true. But the law of property is open to the same objection. A man covets your money or your plate; the law of property forces him either to break into your house, perhaps to murder you, or to restrain his desires. But because men are hanged for murder, no one really wishes to abolish the law of property; because men are transported and imprisoned for frauds and felonies, it is no argument against a law of property."

"That I admit."

"Then surely you must admit, that although the law of marriage may punish those who infringe its precepts, it is not therefore to be abolished."

“No; but there is this difference: the principles of justice and moral education may control the desire of despoiling or defrauding another of his property, but human passion owns no such stern control. Love is beyond volition. The husband cannot will to love his wife, the wife cannot will *not* to love another. Reason is powerless against the passion, because the woman loves before she is aware of it. She does not see the danger till she is enveloped in it. Marriage is indissoluble, but passion is capricious. It is foolish, impious, for a human being to swear that he will love another eternally. Passion in its intensity always believes in its eternity. But who can answer for the continuance of love? Who can say, I will not change? Because we foresee no change, are we to shut our eyes to the experience of ages: to our own experience even, which tells too plainly of the mutability of passion? Yet marriage is indissoluble!”

“And rightly so,” said Cecil, “for this one reason—whatever is inevitable soon ceases to be a hardship; the very power which human

beings have of adapting themselves to almost any condition, makes them accept their fate with tranquillity, provided that fate be certain and unequivocal. Passion is, as you say, mutable, capricious. But in the generality of cases, the mere consciousness of the indissolubility of the marriage tie acts as a check upon the roving fancy."

Hester shook her head.

"This much I will grant," continued Cecil, "that as a matter of sentiment, as a mere question of *love*, I think you are in the main correct; but as a matter of practical civilization, as a civil institution which regards the whole framework of society, I think you—pardon me—altogether wrong."

The clock on the mantelpiece struck one as he said this, and its sharp, thin note struck like ice upon his heart, as he remembered that his beloved Blanche was sitting up awaiting him, and had been since ten o'clock. He took a hasty leave of Hester, promising to renew the conversation some other evening, and, with a whisper to Frank, withdrew.

Hester saw him depart, with a vague feeling of regret. To understand this, we must not only recall the sudden friendship all have known sometimes to spring up in one evening's intercourse, but we must also consider Hester's peculiar position. She was then just recovering from the shock her illusions had sustained with reference to men of genius. In her provincial and poetical ignorance, she had imagined that every man of remarkable powers must be captivating in appearance. Apollo in the shape of Vulcan was a monstrosity which had never distorted her dreams. I do not mean that she supposed every distinguished poet, novelist, or critic was as handsome as a guardsman. She was prepared for daring oddities of appearance; and was more likely to be captivated by the "flashing eyes and floating hair," by the wild irregularities of an inspired face, than by the lineal correctness of a beauty man. But she was prepared to find singularity and youth: a striking appearance joined to all the ardour and impetuosity of youth. In both was she deceived. The

men she saw were for the most part undistinguishable in appearance from the rest of the world, and when distinguishable, not picturesquely so. Above all, they were not young.

It is rather curious at first, to one unfamiliar with the artistic world, to see how little youth is to be met with amongst the celebrities. Our young poets are middle-aged men; our rising authors are bald; our distinguished painters are passing into the "sere and yellow leaf;" our *very* "young Englanders" are getting gray and porsy.

The truth is, life is short and art is long; and although a privileged man does sometimes in the ardour of youth reach the summit of reputation by a bound, either from the prodigal richness of his genius, or from having hit the favour of the movement, yet, as a general rule, celebrity is slowly gained, and not without many years of toilsome effort. Mastery requires immense labour. Before the proper power over materials can be gained, the artist must have spent enormous labour; and before that power can be exerted in any

striking way, the artist must have lived much, suffered much, and observed much. Celebrity is not easily gained now-a-days. The lavish abundance of talent daily, weekly, and monthly squandered upon fugitive productions, makes it no easy matter to rise above the ordinary level; while the multiplicity of works so far exceeds all reading powers to keep pace with them, that, for an author to gain more than a limited and temporary reputation, it is necessary he should either be very lucky, or very earnest, hard-working, resolute, and clever. But before he has attained sufficient mastery to command respect, the gray hairs begin to show themselves. He must have made many efforts, struck many blows, before the way is opened to him, before the world will recognise him.

What a shock then to Hester, when she found, one after the other, all were middle-aged men. The ardour and freshness in their works was but the reminiscence of a youthhood which required the mastery of manhood to mould it. The men she had admired, of

whom she had made idols, when she saw them as they were, with deep-lined faces, thin hair, deficient teeth, and all the signs of premature middle age, created a feeling of disappointment almost amounting to disgust. She forgot that in straining their voices to be heard above the crowd, they had grown husky by the time they had succeeded.

Cecil was the first young handsome man whom she had seen, and who, although not yet known to fame, had a sort of drawing-room reputation; she was charmed with him; his wit, vivacity, gentlemanly manner, and handsome countenance, were all calculated to make a deep impression upon her. Without acknowledging to herself the interest she felt in him, she allowed her thoughts to dwell upon what he had said, and how he had looked, rather more than was safe for her peace of mind.

CHAPTER IX.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

WHEN Blanche received Cecil's note, informing her that he was to dine at the club, she felt truly glad. Ill as she could spare his company, especially in such a house as Mrs. Tring's, she felt glad. The good little thing forgot her own loss in the idea of his pleasure. She was so delighted that he was going to enjoy himself for once among his old friends. After the miserable fare of their boarding-house, how he would relish the cuisine of his club! He wanted a little change. He wanted relaxation: he overworked himself.

This was the way little Blanche accepted her husband's first absence from home. I dare say, thin-lipped madam, you wholly disapprove of

her simplicity ; you think she did not understand men and husbands ; that she showed false generosity. You would not have taken it so quietly—not you ! In her place, you would at once have seen through the selfishness and want of attention which permitted a husband, so newly married, to leave his wife in that way, and return to his vile bachelor haunts. In her place, you would have sat up for him, cowering under a huge shawl, careful that the candles should be burnt to the last inch, you having allowed the fire to go out ; and you would have received him either in the sullen dignity of silence, or with hot, fast-falling tears.

In her place,—But Blanche, my dear madam, had not your thin lips and fretful organization. She was an innocent, artless, affectionate, little creature, adoring her husband, believing herself unworthy of him, and only happy in his happiness. She lived for him. If he was happy by her side, it gave her exquisite delight ; if he was happy, away from her, she felt, indeed, the void of his absence ; but the thought of his

being amused, took from absence its pain. Jealousy she had none. Her trusting nature could not harbour it: certain of his love, to question it would be profanity.

So till ten o'clock she occupied herself cheerily enough. After that, she began to expect him. Eleven struck. "He has been kept later than he intended," she said.

A novel was on the table. She began to read it. Cecil's face was constantly dancing on the page; and, once or twice, when the author mentioned convivial dinners, she pictured to herself Cecil surrounded by admirers, the wine passing freely, no one heeding the time; and, as the clock struck twelve, she said, "He is greatly amused."

There was something of the sublime devotion of woman's love in this quiet reflection, which, as in all generosity, had its own sweet recompense. The thought made her happy, and hid from her the fact that it was twelve o'clock, and she was waiting for him.

She continued her novel.

Cecil was hurrying home, very uneasy at

having stayed out so late. The stupor which wine had occasioned was quite gone, and he began to reproach himself for having accompanied Chetsom to Hester's. He had never left Blanche before. How could she have passed her evening? What would her anxiety be when ten, then eleven, then twelve, then one o'clock struck, and he not home? What excuse should he make?

Nothing can better express the difference between Cecil and Blanche, than these two thoughts:—

“He is greatly amused!”

“What excuse shall I make?”

The confidence and love of the one is not more distinctly indicated by the first, than the weakness of the other is by the second.

No excuse was needed. When he arrived home, instead of reproaches, silent or expressed, he was met with kisses and joyous questions. All she seemed curious about was, how he had been amused. For herself, she had passed the time pleasantly enough. Her work and her novel had amused her. Oh, he

wasn't to think himself of such consequence : existence was not insupportable without him—for a few hours !

Cecil took both her hands in his, and, pressing his lips upon her lovely eyes, felt deeply, inexpressibly, what a treasure he had got ; but he said nothing ; nor was it necessary to say it. She understood him.

Cecil was careful not to whisper a word of Hester's equivocal position to Blanche, who imagined Miss Mason to be some worthy old maid.

On the following Wednesday, Cecil again went to Hester's, and again spent a pleasant evening. He there met some painters, whom he was desirous to know. This gave a colouring of business to his visits—a pretext to himself, for Blanche needed none.

The more Hester saw of Cecil, the more he engaged her fancy, and, at last, her affections. Of this he was wholly unconscious. His own love for his wife was an amulet against all Hester's coqueties. But although no harm as yet had come to his affections, through

this acquaintance with Hester, who could say that it would long continue thus? Cecil must discover her affection in time, and then . . .

Yet into this peril did Blanche innocently urge him. She knew he was amused there; she knew he there extended his acquaintance among artists; and she was happy that he should take the relaxation of one evening in the week.

The peril was, however, twofold: it was not only that Cecil should be entangled by Hester—that was an uncertainty; it was also—and this more certain—that the poor, struggling artist, by nature indolent, and by accident now pampered in his indolence, should, in these club dinners and conversaziones, once more have the desire for luxury awakened in him, and a distaste for his present condition render it insupportable.

This latter peril was perhaps the more formidable of the two. Cecil fell into it. The oftener he went to his club—he had never ceased paying his subscription, having always had the prospect of very soon being

in a condition to belong to a club with propriety—the oftener he went there, the greater his disgust at the gloomy house and niggardly fare of the home he had chosen. Unhappily he could not leave it. Partly, because his funds made its cheapness all important; partly, because he still hoped its beggary would work upon Meredith Vyner's feelings.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE FEIGNED AND LOVE CONCEALED.

Fidelia. You act love, sir! you must but act it indeed after all I have said to you. Think of your honour, sir:—love!

Manly. Well, call it revenge, and that is honourable. I'll be revenged on her.

WYCHERLEY.—*The Plain Dealer.*

WHEN the Vyners returned to town, and Rose discovered that Julius was in Italy, the grief which had assailed her, in the first remorse at having played with his affection, was crossed with a certain feeling of indignation at the calmness, as she called it, with which he accepted his fate. This was very unreasonable, I allow; very. It was not at all like a

heroine; but it was like a woman, I believe; and certainly like Rose.

For you must understand that my little darling, Rose, so exquisitely pretty, so witty, so charming, and so good *au fond*, was by no means faultless. She had her whims and caprices, her faults and her follies, just as if she were an ordinary woman, and not the heroine of a three volume novel. If I were painting women as they *should be*, of course no speck or flaw would I permit upon the radiant loveliness of my picture; but women as they *are*—the darlings!—admit of no such flattery.

Rose reasoned thus:—He *must* know I love him; or, if he is so blind as not to have seen it, he ought at least to have persevered. Who ever heard of a man giving up a woman in that cool way, because she did not throw herself into his arms, the first moment it pleased him to declare himself? He can't be really in love. He is *rationally* attached to me; and reason tells him to—go to Italy! Does he

expect I am to follow him? does he expect I am to write to him? does he expect I am to be penitent? He is greatly mistaken! I will forget him : I will !

But she could not. She was angry with him ; but his image was constantly before her. A spirit naturally high, and fostered into a sort of pugnacity by the experience of her school life, Rose was at all times too apt to rebel against the least opposition, and never learnt to brook what could be construed into an insult. Julius's conduct seemed to her an insult. Either it was dictated by a coolness not akin to genuine love, or it was dictated by a desire to make her repent her refusal. She adopted both suggestions alternately, and both she construed into an offence. Her pride was roused, and the struggle between pride and love had thrown her into that "slight fever" of which she spoke to Blanche.

She went into society with the determination of forgetting Julius, and of finding some one to replace him in her heart—but found no one.

Violet began to suffer the depressing forebodings of jealousy. She loved Marmaduke, and confessed it to herself. His attentions to Mrs. Vyner at first irritated her, because she thought them hypocritical, knowing his opinion of that false woman; and she could not brook the idea of his stooping to conciliate one he despised, although he did so merely to gain a frequent admission to the house. But after a little while she fancied there was *more* in his attentions, and that they had another aim.

This idea was slow in gaining ground, but it gained it steadily. Unwilling as she must have been to believe it, both on account of Mrs. Vyner being married, and also on account of Marmaduke's very expressive attentions to herself, nevertheless there was no withstanding the horrible suggestions of appearances; and combat them as she might, they gained ground in her mind. Now rising into something like a certainty, now driven back again by some word, look, or act which

spoke too plainly of his love for her ; but advancing and receding, and advancing and receding again, like the alternating progress of a tide flowing in, this horrible idea gained upon her.

Marmaduke's conduct was indeed calculated to foster that suspicion. He was placed in a strange position. Violet he loved, ardently loved ; but his impetuous nature somewhat curbed itself before her equally haughty and still more powerful mind. Violet had the superiority of moral elevation, and moral firmness. Marmaduke, though firm and dauntless, was more volatile ; his organization was of that nervous and impressionable order, which, although capable of carrying him with indomitable firmness through anything he willed, was nevertheless more easily swayed by the caprice and passion of the moment, than the more self-sustained calm strength of Violet. He instinctively stood in a sort of awe of her. He bowed down to her superior nature, which he admired and worshipped ; but he did not feel

so much her slave as Mary Hardcastle had made him feel hers.

Perhaps this difference arose from the changes which had taken place in his own nature, since the time when Mary Hardcastle had called him hers. I know not. Certain it is that the tiny sylph-like Mary exercised an almost absolute power over him; while the imperial Violet cowed, but did not master him. Above all, he was repelled by Violet's coldness. If in the country she had sometimes damped his ardour by her haughty reserve, she had, since their arrival in town, scarcely ever unbended, for she was hurt at his attentions to Mrs. Vyner.

From time to time he fancied he discerned in her manner a secret passion for him, and then his devotion to her was such as to irritate Mrs. Vyner with tormenting suspicions. But these were only passing moods; Violet soon relapsed into her old manner, and the baffled indignant Marmaduke turned impatiently again to Mrs. Vyner.

As love seemed denied him, at least he would secure his revenge. To secure that, required immense thought and ingenuity. He bestowed upon it the patience and finesse of a savage. It was a drama which called forth all his faculties, and which, as it might deepen into tragedy at any moment, kept him in a state of intense excitement, and greatly confused his moral perceptions.

The last sentence is one upon which I would lay great stress, because it enables me to explain Marmaduke's actions, which, however inexcusable, are not to be judged as if they were the results of calm deliberation. Passion blinded him, as it blinds all men; confused his judgment while sharpening his instincts; and altogether distorted his sense of moral rectitude.

Nor is this all: the excitement not only confused his moral sense, but also, by a physiological law, the subtle power of sympathy, changed what was originally a pretence into a reality. The love we begin by feigning, we

end by feeling ; at least so far as the mere sensuousness of the feeling goes. Excitement at all times has a singular power of awakening into life the germs of vague desires. It intensifies a thought into a desire, a desire into a passion.

Marmaduke began by feigning a return of his former love for Mrs. Meredith Vyner. Her artful doubts increased his desire to convince her. His increased eagerness gave greater sharpness, and distinctness to that desire. Carried away by his own acting, he began at last to feel some of the passion of his part. Memory recalled the charms he once adored ; and Mrs. Vyner was there in all the fascination of her strange beauty, to make his pulses vibrate as of old. The spell of those tiger eyes ; the perfume of that golden hair ; the witchery of that fantastic manner, began to move the voluptuousness within him, as before. And the very restraints imposed upon him no less by her position, than by her adroit avoidance of him, irritated him the more.

She would not permit him to breathe a word of his passion. She would not suffer him to take her hand; to his ardour she opposed her affectation of moral scruples, and what "was due to her husband!" She kept him at a distance, without forbidding him the house.

The result was, that Desire intensified the passion of Revenge. He not only burned to conquer, in order that he might gratify the dark passion which was rankling in his heart, as it only rankles in those "children of the sun," but also because the woman he hated fascinated him.

This fascination will be incomprehensible to those whose colder temperaments, or more limited experience, have not brought home to them the fact that we may at once despise and admire; that we may have indeed, a positive contempt for a person in whose presence we are as if under a spell.

The secret is, that esteem and respect are founded upon moral sympathies and judgments; but the charm of beauty and manner

appeals to the more sensuous and emotional parts of our nature, and these, while the charm continues, triumph.

Thus Marmaduke, when alone, despised Mrs. Meredith Vyner, as one who knew her ; but in her presence he was often strangely fascinated. Did he then cease to love Violet ? Not he. His heart never wavered ; never for an instant did she step from off the pedestal on which his love had placed her. True that, owing to the wide signification in which the word Love is used, he may have been said at times to love Mrs. Vyner, because he certainly often felt for her that desire which is all some men know of love. But, call it by what name you please, it had no affinity to the love he felt for Violet.

And Mrs. Vyner ? She was proud, excessively proud, of her triumph. She watched Violet's dawning jealousy, and deepening sadness, with a quiet savageness, horrible to think of ; and she noted the increasing entanglement of Marmaduke in her net, with the pride of a

coquette regaining her prey, and triumphing over a handsomer younger woman.

She never for an instant doubted Marmaduke's sincerity ; and although his attentions to Violet sometimes irritated her, she deceived herself by supposing that he only paid them to excite her jealousy.

I have observed a paradoxical fact in human nature, which I here record, without professing to explain it ; and it is this—hypocrites are easily duped by the hypocrisy of another, and liars are always credulous. La Rochefoucauld has also noticed that “ *quelque défiance que nous ayons de la sincérité de ceux qui nous parlent, nous croyons toujours qu'ils nous disent plus vrai qu'aux autres.* ” I suppose it is in both cases our confidence in our own sagacity which misleads us ; but there is the fact, let moralists make what they can of it.

Well, this fact explains to us why that consummate actress, Mrs. Meredith Vyner, was completely duped by the acting of Marmaduke, the truth of whose passion she never

thought of doubting. And what was said before respecting the effect of acting upon the mind, and its changing pretence into reality, must also be applied to her: with all the greater force arising from her mind not being in any way disposed against him, as his mind was against her. If he, who hated her, was insensibly led to feel something of the passion which he feigned, how much more likely would she be to admit the same influence, her mind being free from all dislike?

She began to love him, but it was in *her* way: with the head not the heart, with her senses not her soul!

CHAPTER II.

DOUBTS CHANGED INTO CERTAINTIES.

VIOLET's fears were soon to be confirmed.

The reader may remember a certain Mrs. Henley, mentioned in our prologue as the friend who consented to favour the meetings of Marmaduke and Mary, and whose kindness Mary never, never could forget. He will not be surprised to hear that Mary Hardcastle, on becoming Mrs. Meredith Vyner, considerably cut her former friend; a proceeding which so much astonished Mrs. Henley, that she declared she had "always expected as much."

Now this Mrs. Henley was a sort of distant cousin of the anecdotal Mrs. Merryweather,

who boarded at the Tring establishment. Mrs. Henley calling one day upon her cousin, was shown into that gloomy reception-room the reader knows, and there, amongst other subjects of gossip, the fellow-boarders of Mrs. Merryweather were biographically and critically touched upon by that lively lady. When she came to Blanche, and mentioned her being the daughter of no less a person than Meredith Vyner, Esq., Mrs. Henley interrupted her to give a detailed character of Mrs. Vyner, with an eloquent account of her base ingratitude, and of the shameful way in which she had treated poor Mr. Ashley.

This information Mrs. Merryweather, of course, imparted to Blanche, with more circumlocutions and interspersed anecdotes than the reader would like to have set down here. Blanche, aware of the state of her sister's affections, felt somewhat uneasy on learning Marmaduke's previous attachment; and although she did not guess how matters stood, yet the idea of his having so far forgotten his

former love, as to pay court to a step-daughter greatly puzzled her.

The next time Violet and Rose called upon her, she communicated to them the information she had received. Rose was greatly scandalized, Violet deeply moved.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Rose, “to think of mama having behaved so! But can it be true? Yes; the information is too precise. Yet Marmaduke has forgiven. . . .”

“But not *forgotten* her!” said Violet, in a calm, stern voice.

“What do you mean?”

“He loves her still.”

“Violet!”

“I am very serious.”

“And his attentions to you . . .?”

“Hypocrisy!”

“Impossible! Violet, how can you think so ill of people?”

“You often ask me, Rose, how I can think so ill of mama. Yet you have to-day heard that which will partly justify me. You believe

that mama assists dear Blanche, by money saved from her own allowance. I *know* that it is papa who sends the money. I tell you she is made up of falsehood."

"But Marmaduke?"

"Of him I thought better—yet you see?"

"I see nothing. He loves you—has forgiven mama, and is attentive to her merely to gain opportunities of seeing you."

Violet shook her head mournfully.

"Do not condemn him unheard, Violet. Watch him closely, then question him. You know not what explanation he may have. Oh! do not let there be more misunderstanding in our family."

Violet had turned away her head to conceal her tears, but the effort was in vain; her uncontrollable grief burst forth more violently from having been a while restrained.

She resolved to bring Marmaduke to an explanation that very evening, and the resolution calmed her.

It so happened that during the day Mar-

maduke had been more than usually irritated by Mrs. Vyner's manners. He had spoken to her eloquent words of love, and demanded a return; the more impassioned he became, the more she drew back behind her position as a married woman.

"You love me," he exclaimed, "I know you love me. You cannot deny it."

"Marmaduke, I have already told you this is language I must not, will not listen to."

"Answer me: can you deny it?"

"I shall answer nothing of the kind."

"But I insist."

"If I must leave the room," she said, "if you force me to leave it,—and unless you change the subject, I shall certainly do so,—this will be the last time I shall ever trust myself in your presence."

He rose, and took up his hat as if to depart.

"Mary, you will repent this."

She only shrugged her shoulders.

He moved towards the door.

"Do you dine here to-day?" she said, with

an affectation of carelessness, through which pierced an entreaty.

“No.”

He left her in anger. He did not dine there that day, but he came in during the evening. Rose and Violet, watching his manner very closely, could see nothing in it but polished courtesy, mixed with some slight indications of dislike towards Mrs. Vyner, unmixed courtesy towards Meredith Vyner, and unmistakeable affection for Violet.

In truth he was more attentive to Violet that evening, owing to the scene just recorded ; and when Mrs. Vyner proposed a game at chess he declined it, on the ground that he should not be able to stay long enough that evening ; he was engaged to two parties. Yet he never moved from Violet’s side until past eleven !

“Well,” said Rose, as she went into Violet’s room that night, “what do you say now?”

“I think you are right.”

“I am sure of it.”

“And yet, Rose—place yourself in my po-

sition—is it not horrible to think of his having once loved her?”

Rose felt that it was, but unwilling to say so, merely remarked that he was then but a boy, and boys must love somebody.

“Yes, but *her*! Any one rather than her! Oh, Rose, I shall never be happy!”

“Don’t say that. He has clearly forgotten all about it—treats it as a boyish flirtation. His heart is undeniably yours—happy girl that you are to be able to say so! Would that I could know Julius was mine on the same conditions!”

“Would you accept him?”

“Gladly.”

“And the thought of her would not poison your happiness?”

“No.”

Violet sighed deeply, and was silent. She tried to persuade herself that she ought not to be affected by the dark and bitter thoughts arising from the discovery of her lover’s prior attachment; but instinctively she returned to

the subject, to dwell on it with morbid satisfaction.

She passed a wretched night. Broken dreams of Marmaduke at her mother's feet, suddenly changing to dreams of her own marriage, interrupted at the foot of the altar, made her sleep restless. Her waking thoughts were scarcely less irritating. Sometimes she would try to believe that Mrs. Henley might have been misinformed, sometimes that the Mr. Ashley of whom she spoke might have been another Mr. Ashley, and sometimes that it was a mere flirtation which gossip had magnified into an engagement. But these thoughts were chased away by the recollection of various looks interchanged with Marmaduke, when her mother was mentioned, looks which plainly told her that he had discovered the falsehood which was under the little creature's affected sensibility and goodness.

CHAPTER III.

DECLARATION.

MARMADUKE persevered for several days in his system of polite indifference towards Mrs. Meredith Vyner, while his attentions to Violet became more and more explicit. Her suspicions were gradually giving way.

One evening they sat in the drawing-room discussing *Norma*, which they had seen the night before ; and passing from the singers to the story, Violet remarked what a grand tragic idea it contained.

“Yet I scarcely think,” said Mrs. Vyner, “that the story is taken up at its best point. Suppose the author had shown us the early struggles of *Norma*—her passion gradually

consuming religious scruples—would not that have been fine? Then, again, after she loves Pollio, her struggles to conceal from others the crime she has been guilty of; surely there is nothing more fearful than the combat in a woman's breast, when she is hourly striving first to resist a passion, and then to conceal it because she knows its guilt!"

Her eyes were bent upon Marmaduke as she said this, and Violet noticed their strange expression.

"You will accuse me of libelling your sex," said he, laughing, "if I answer as I think."

"Let us hear what ill you think of us," said Rose. "Mr. Wincot will defend us, I am sure; won't you?"

Tom Wincot, who was quietly winning Vyner's money at *écarté*, answered, as he marked the king,—

"You know, Miss Wose, knight-ewantwy is a pwinciple with me; without being woman-tic I have an exaggewated wespect for the

sex, which makes me credulous of all their virtues; so rely on me."

"Oh, I am not going to maintain my opinion at the sword's point," said Marmaduke; "but, nevertheless, since you wish to hear it, this it is: women are such capital actresses, that I fancy it would have given Norma very little trouble either to feign or conceal any feeling she pleased."

"Atrocious! . . . (I propose — thence, if you please)."

"Mr. Ashley's opinion of the sex does not say much for his acquaintance with it," said Violet, with a slight touch of scorn in her tone.

"It does not," he replied; "in fact, my *early* impressions were not calculated to make me gallant."

He looked at Mrs. Vyner as he spoke; she kept her eyes fixed on her embroidery; but Violet noticed her efforts to conceal agitation.

The entrance of Sir Chetsom Chetsom put

an end to the discussion. The old beau was more resplendent than ever; and the belief that Hester loved him had really made him look younger. Conversation became frivolous at once, except between Marmaduke and Violet, who were earnestly talking together: too earnestly for Mrs. Vyner's comfort, and, accordingly, she from time to time addressed a question to Marmaduke, in the hope of bringing him into the general discourse; but he contented himself with a simple reply, and then resumed what he was saying to Violet.

Jealousy was tormenting Mrs. Vyner, and Marmaduke knew it. He had so studied every look and movement of her, that, actress as she was, she could not easily deceive him; and he felt a strange delight in thus penetrating beneath her mask, and there contemplating the agitated features.

To understand his persistence in the perilous game he was playing, you must endeavour to appreciate the strange, intense, never-ceasing

excitement which every scene of the drama afforded him; you must remember that almost every phrase had its interpretation, every trivial act revealed some motive, every look was carefully noted. Of her consummate hypocrisy he was fully aware; but he was also aware that she loved him. How much was love, and how much pretence, he could not tell, and he was always on the alert to discover it; meanwhile, the very doubt was an extra stimulus. Those who, no matter for what purpose, have ever been obliged thus to watch the acts, words, and looks of one whose real motives and feelings it is important they should detect, will be able to understand the excitement of this situation. Marmaduke the more readily indulged in it owing to his peculiar organization, which made excitement a sort of necessary stimulus to him.

That very evening he saw her turning over the leaves of a book, occasionally casting an anxious glance at the contents, which made him aware that she was seeking for some par-

ticular passage. At last she seemed to find it. The silk ribbon, which served to mark the place, she moved from where it was before, and with a careless and apparently unintentional action, let it fall at that part of the volume which she then held open. Turning over a few more leaves, she then closed the book, and leaned her arm upon it.

Violet had also noticed this, but in that casual way in which we notice things which have no significance for us at the time, though afterwards, when some light is thrown upon them, the memory repeats every detail. This she had *seen* without *observing*. In about ten minutes afterwards Mrs. Vyner said,—

“By-the-bye, Mr. Ashley, were not you to borrow my Petrarch? Here it is for you. Be careful of it, for it is one of my favourite books.”

Marmaduke at once guessed there was something in this offer, which did not appear on the face of it; and then recollecting her search for a passage, and the removal of the

book-marker, concluded that the passage was meant for him to read.

Violet recollected it also, and rightly guessed the meaning.

Marmaduke took the volume, and placed it on a side table, and then resumed his conversation with Violet.

Her anxiety to get hold of the volume, and read the pages where the book-marker was placed, became so great that she soon ceased to pay any attention to what he said. By way of diverting him from the present position, she proposed that they should sing a duet. He readily accepted, and Rossini's *M'abbraccia Argirio* was at once commenced.

When that was finished, Violet asked him to sing *Io son ricco e tu sei bella* from L'Elisir d'Amore, with Rose, and while they were singing it, she returned to her former place. Then, as if casually, but with an agitated heart, she took up the Petrarch. It opened at the Trionfo della Morte, at that passage where Laura makes the exquisite avowal of

her love veiled by reserve; as Violet read these words,—

Mai diviso
Da te non fu'l mio cor, nè giammai fia;
Ma temprai la tua fiamma col mio viso.
Perchè a salvar te e me, null' altra via
Era alla nostra giovinetta fama;*

Her breath was suspended, and with a feeling of sick anxiety, she continued to read,—

Quante volte diss' io : questi non ama
Anzi arde, onde convien ch' a ciò proveggia.
E mal può provveder chi teme o brama.
Quel di fuor miri, e quel dentro non veggia.†

Her head began to swim; there was no mistaking the significance of the avowal. With an effort she continued—

Più di mille fiate ira dipinse
Il volto mio, ch' amor ardeva il core,
Ma voglia in me ragion giammai non vinse.

* “Never was my heart separated from thee, never will it be; but I tempered the ardour of thy passion with the austerit of my look, since there was no other way to save us both.”

† “How often have I said to myself, he loves me, nay, he burns for me, and I must avert the danger: let him see my face, but not what passes in my heart!”

Poi se vinto ti vidi dal dolore
Drizzai'n te gli occhi allor soavemente
Salvando la tua vita e'l nostro onore.*

The lights danced before her eyes, her head was dizzy, and had she been alone she must have fainted; but the strong necessity for self-mastery gave her strength.

Marmaduke's clear voice was at that moment giving mock tenderness to the words—

Idol mio non più rigor,
Fa felice un senator.

Tom Wincot was leisurely dealing.

Violet was horribly conscious of her position, and gaining, in that consciousness, energy enough to subdue her emotion, with a trembling hand she replaced the book. As she did so, her eye encountered, for an instant, the piercing gaze of Mrs. Vyner. It was but a look, it lasted but an instant, but in that look what meaning was concentrated!

* "A thousand times and more, anger was painted on my brow, while love flamed in my heart; but never did desire vanquish reason in me. Then, when I saw thee subdued by grief, I softly raised my eyes to thine, thus saving thy life and our honour."

The duet was finished, and Mrs. Vyner was by Marmaduke's side, complimenting him on his singing, before Violet had recovered from the shock which that look had given her.

What a situation ! Not only had she intercepted Mrs. Vyner's unmistakeable avowal, but she had been detected by her in the very act. The secret was not only discovered, but it was known to be discovered.

Violet, unable longer to remain in the room, retired quietly to indulge in her intense sorrow by herself.

With a sense of utter desolation she threw herself on a chair, her eyes fixed vacantly on the ground, her hurrying thoughts whirling round one object, restless, agitating, and feverish. She did not cry at first : it was more like stupor than grief ; but as her ideas became clearer, they awakened her to anguish, and she wept.

She wept over the hopelessness of her love ; she wept over the degradation of her lover.

Low sobs burst from her, and the tears which rolled down her cheeks were unchecked.

A touch upon her hand startled her : it was the rough paw of her affectionate Shot, who had been seated by her side, looking sorrowfully in her face, sympathizing with her sorrow ; finding himself unheeded, he had lifted his paw, and rested it upon her hand. She smiled mournfully upon him through her tears ; he answered her with a plaintive whine, and rising upon his hind legs, thrust his shaggy head caressingly into her hand.

“ My poor Shot ! ” she said, “ *you* love me—you are not false ! ”

He whined again, and thrust his nose into her hand.

But his demonstrations of affection only made her grief the greater, his caressing whining sympathy only made her more painfully aware of her need for sympathy, and she sank back in a paroxysm of tears which lasted some time. Then rising, she dried her eyes, gulped

down her sighs with a strong effort, and said,—
“I will endure!”

The passion of her grief had passed, and she
was calm.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TEMPEST LOURS.

IMMEDIATELY on reaching home that night, Marmaduke sat down to read the pages of Petrarch, which had been so significantly marked for him. As he found the passages before quoted, his attention became excessively eager; and having read them with curious emotion, he re-read them with intense care, weighing every line, and interpreting them to the fullest extent.

He let the book fall upon the table, and throwing himself back in his arm chair, allowed the current of his thoughts to take their flattering course.

No man can receive, unmoved, the avowal

of a woman's love; and when that avowal breaks through all prudence, and disdains all ties, the flattery is irresistible. To Marmaduke, it had an additional charm: it was the capitulation of an enemy he had almost despaired of conquering. His revenge was at hand!

But now the crisis was so near, his perplexity became tenfold. Now Mrs. Vyner was won, he was condemned to adopt some plan which would both secure his vengeance, yet not lose Violet.

Violet had not been so cold of late. His ideas also became clearer. The agitation of doubt once passed—Mrs. Vyner's declaration having stilled his impatience—his love for Violet resumed its empire. He saw that his vengeance was impossible, if he still thought of her; yet he could not renounce his vengeance. How to attain both objects? He would invent some plan.

He was in anxious doubt. The invention on which he had relied to extricate him when

the crisis came was now powerless. He could think of nothing feasible.

Men who scheme are too apt to be caught in their own nets, from this reckless confidence in their resources. They foresee the danger but shut their eyes to it. They propose to avoid it by "some plan." But the vagueness of "some" plan, has to be changed into the precision of one decided plan, when the time for action arrives; and this must be one adequate to the occasion.

The next day Violet accompanied Rose on a visit to Fanny Worsley, who was about to be married. The invitation was eagerly accepted by Violet, for home had become hideous since the fatal discovery of Mrs. Vyner's guilty passion. The agonizing struggles she had gone through on becoming fully aware of her own hopeless love, had sorely tried the strength of her soul; for although she could not doubt that Marmaduke loved her, however inexplicable his relations to Mrs. Vyner, yet she at once saw that these must utterly destroy all hope of

ever being united to him, even could she so far overcome her own scruples as to accept him. ✓ But the masculine strength of mind with which she was endowed, saved her from being entirely prostrated by the blow. She rose up against misfortune, looked it fixedly, though mournfully, in the face, saw its extent, and resigned herself with stoic courage. Suffer she did, and deeply ; but she bore it as an irremediable affliction, and thus, by shutting herself from the wearying agitations of fallacious hopes, saved herself from a great source of pain.

Rose had marked the sudden change in her demeanour, and the traces of violent grief in her face ; but all her affectionate questions had been so evidently painful, that she ceased to ask them. The impatience Violet exhibited to be gone, the anxiety to leave home, more and more excited her curiosity, and as the carriage rolled away from the door, and Violet fervently exclaimed “thank God !” Rose twined an arm round her waist, and said,—

“Dearest Violet, tell me what has hap-

pened. Something I know has. Your wretchedness is too visible. Do tell me."

Violet burst into tears, and throwing her arms round her sister's neck, kept her tightly embraced for some minutes, sobbing fearfully, and kissing her, but making no effort to speak.

"Talk of it, do dear," said Rose, sobbing with her; "it will comfort you."

Violet only pressed her closer.

"Tell me what it is. Perhaps I shall be able to explain it."

Violet sobbed, and shook her head in despair.

"Dear, dear, Violet! Don't give way so. Tell me what it is. It may be only some misunderstanding. It may be cleared up by a word."

Not a word escaped from the wretched girl. Rose wiped away her sister's fast falling tears, and then wiped her own eyes, and kissed and entreated, but no answer could she get, beyond a sob, a moan, or a violent pressure of the hand.

In this way they rode on for some miles.

Exhausted with weeping, Violet closed her eyes, and dozed awhile upon her sister's shoulder. When she awoke she was calm again. A deep, unutterable sadness, sharpened her pallid features; and, in a low voice, she said,—

“Dear Rose, let me beg of you to ask me no questions respecting my grief: it is irreparable, and it cannot be mentioned. I shall have strength to bear it, at least I hope so—but not strength to talk of it. Leave me to my own reflections and to time. Let them know at Fanny's that I have been ill, and am not yet recovered; but give no hint of any cause for sorrow.”

CHAPTER V.

VACILLATION.

Lady Plyant. O consider it, what you would have to answer for, if you should provoke me to frailty. Alas ! humanity is feeble, and unable to support itself.

WYCHERLEY.—*The Double Dealer.*

WHEN Marmaduke called, he found Mrs. Vyner as polite and as distant as before, with something in her manner which looked like timidity. He had anticipated a very different reception. After the implicit avowal, contained in the passage of Petrarch, he anticipated that all coquetry, all reserve, would be cast aside, and that she would throw herself into his arms. How little he understood her !

Irritated by this resumption of her former manner, he at last said,—

“Mary, I am not to be trifled with any longer. Tell me once for all,—Did you give me that book on Monday evening to make a fool of me ; or did you give it that I might understand you ? ”

She was knitting a purse, and continued her work without making the slightest observation.

“Mary, take care ! take care ! I am violent—do not rouse me. I must decide to-day whether I am to be your’s or *another’s*.”

She trembled slightly as he said this, and raised her eyes to his.

“You have played with my affection too long already. To-day must end it. Mary, do you love me ? ”

She kept her eyes fixed upon his, and smiled.

“I will take no equivocal answer,” he said, rising, and approaching her ; “if it is to end, it had better end at once.”

She shook back her golden tresses, and motioning him to be seated, with a most sig-

nificant smile, said,—“ Marmaduke, you need not go.”

He sat upon the ground at her feet, and looking up into her face, whispered,—

“ My own Mary ! ”

She drooped over him, so as to cover his head with her luxuriant hair, and kissed him on the brow.

His heart swelled with triumph, and his senses were violently agitated.

She also triumphed, as she gazed upon the fierce, impetuous creature whom she had subdued, and who now sat at her feet, his head resting on her lap, passion darting from his lustrous eyes, sitting there her slave and her adorer. A scornful remembrance of the haughty Violet, over whom she now triumphed, gave additional keenness to her delight.

After allowing him to remain some minutes in ecstatic contemplation, she bade him rise.

“ Oh, let me still sit here. Here could I spend my life. Here, my own exquisite Mary,

at your feet—your strange eyes looking thus into mine, and stirring the fibres of my heart as no eyes ever stirred them.”

“Dearest Marmaduke, remember our love is sacred, but it must not make us forget prudence—

Salvando la tua vita e'l nostro onore.”

This quotation from the passage in Petrarch at once checked the current of Marmaduke's feelings, and made him remember he had a part to play. It quelled the emotions of the scene, and recalled to him that he was but an actor.

He rose, and with well-feigned reluctance entered into her plans for the preservation of her honour and her virtue, without, at the same time, affecting their love. They were to love Platonically; they were to imitate Petrarch and Laura in the depth, constancy, and purity of their affection.

“Now,” thought he, “for my revenge.”

How great his vexation when he found that Violet had left home, and left it for some

weeks. He had anticipated an immediate triumph; he thought from vows of Platonic and Petrarchian love to pass at once to his declaration to Violet, so that his engagement to her should come upon Mrs. Vyner like a thunderclap. But now he saw this delayed for weeks; and to one of his impatient temper this was a serious irritation.

The absence of Violet weakened his resolution. He was too susceptible of Mrs. Vyner's personal charms, and too fascinated by her manner, to remain long in her society without danger. So long as Violet was present, her magnificent beauty and strong character were as spells upon him, which counteracted the more sensual attractions of Mrs. Vyner, and kept him to his meditated plans. But Violet absent, his senses and vanity were laid open to the assaults of the adroit coquette. He became more and more in earnest. His desire for her possession daily encroached upon his desire for vengeance; till at last he began to think only of accomplishing the former.

The reader may condemn him : he will do so ; but he should remember that Marmaduke was no paragon of virtue, who could resist the temptations of his senses and his vanity. He belonged, indeed, to that race of human beings on whom, however great the moral qualities, yet, from their highly nervous organizations, temptation comes with tenfold force to what it does on colder-blooded mortals. He had fine qualities ; but neither his education nor his organization fitted him for a paragon. He was, indeed, a most imperfect hero : very erring, very human. And, bold and reckless as he was, he pursued the suggestions of his erring nature without regard to consequences : if those suggestions were noble, they led him to heroism ; if base, they led him to crime. I state the facts, " nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice ; " let those cast the first stone at him, who feel they can do so with a clear conscience.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRIAL.

Sa pensée est un monde son cœur un abîme ;
C'est ainsi qu'elle va, forte, de crime en crime
Bravant impunément et la peuple et la cour
Ne méritant que haine et n'inspirant qu'amour !

MAD. EMILE GIRARDIN.—*Cléopâtre.*

POOR Meredith Vyner was tormented with jealousy. He had blindly credited his wife, when she told him that she sought to bring about a match between Marmaduke and Violet, and had rivalled her in his attentions to the bold suitor, who was to wed this imperious girl. But from time to time he had felt twinges of jealousy. It seemed to him that Marmaduke was a great deal too atten-

tive to his wife. He dared not make any remark ; but he observed it with pain. Now, that Violet was away, and he saw Marmaduke still more assiduous in his visits, saw him daily in the house, and closeted with his wife for hours together, his suspicions began to assume a more galling fixity.

He could not deceive himself respecting the dangerous attractions of his rival. He could not persuade himself that a man of his age had any strong hold of a young woman's affections. Indeed, his wife had recently too often reminded him of the difference of their ages, and made him feel too grateful for the slightest show of affection, for him to doubt the precariousness of his tenure. It was one of the weapons she used against him ; she knew its value, and never allowed it to rust. Although, therefore, he adored her, was proud of her, was proud of even the slight degree of love she pretended to feel for him, he began to feel that the degree was but small ; and this was perhaps the principal cause of his sub-

missive spaniel-like adoration. Poor human nature !

If, however, the consciousness of the small return which his affection met with, made that affection greater, it also made his jealousy more poignant, and more easily alarmed. He never saw any one pay her the slightest attention without a qualm. He was jealous of old men, he was jealous of young men ; he was jealous of fools, he was jealous of wits ; he was even jealous of his daughters, because she showed them so much tenderness !

Judge, then, what he must have felt when he began to see clearly into the nature of Marmaduke's attention ! The poor old pedant used to pace up and down his study, sometimes up and down the corridor, while Marmaduke was sitting alone with her in the drawing-room, or in her boudoir ; never venturing to enter, lest his anxiety should be legible on his countenance, and counting the minutes till the tête-à-tête broke up.

Several times, while she was out in the car-

riage, did he open her escritoire, of which he had a duplicate key, and hurriedly read all the letters there locked up. But he found nothing that he could construe into an appearance of criminality. The notes from Marmaduke were friendly answers to invitations, for the most part, or trifling communications, in which no word of tenderness, no allusion to secrets, could give him the slightest uneasiness. Marmaduke had been too guarded ever to allow himself a suspicious phrase. Not that he feared Vyner, but because he knew the danger of letters.

These fruitless searches only threw the jealous husband into fresh perplexities, and made him doubt the justice of the suspicions which Marmaduke's manner invariably revived.

Nor was it Marmaduke's attentions which alone alarmed him. His wife's manner was greatly changed. She no longer came into his study that he might read aloud to her for an hour or two in the morning. She no longer

interested herself in his Horatian labours. She no longer cajoled him, no longer petted him. She was fretful, capricious, abstracted. She threw his old age more frequently in his face. She began to talk sentimentally about "incompatibilities;" and to declaim about the necessity for "passion." The gay, little, sarcastic, worldly-wise woman changed into a fervent admirer of Petrarch, Byron, and Rousseau.

Symptoms not to be mistaken!

The truth is, Mrs. Vyner, always more in earnest than Marmaduke, had now so completely caught the feeling of the part she had assumed, that from feigning, it had passed into reality. She loved him. She even sighed over her lot in being wedded to another, and reproached herself for having been false to her first love.

What had she gained by her falsehood? Station and wealth; but with it a false and difficult position as stepmother to three girls; and an old, foolish, pedantic husband whom she mastered, but could not love. And what

are wealth and station in comparison with affection ?

The amount of the change which had taken place may be estimated by that one question.

Such being the disposition of the parties, it may seem strange that matters did not speedily come to a crisis. But neither the passion of these guilty lovers, nor the jealousy of the husband forced a crisis ; and for this reason :—

Marmaduke had early committed a capital mistake ; a mistake, I mean, in gallantry. Urged by the impetuosity of his nature, he had endeavoured to overcome her resistance by persuading her to be his. Now, a woman yields from excitement, not from persuasion : passion, not argument, is the instrument of her fall. In endeavouring to argue the point with her, he was always at a disadvantage, because his cause was so bad, and he forced her to bring forward good *reasons* for refusal. Having uttered these reasons she was forced to abide by them, not because they were right, but because she could not so glaringly contradict them by her acts.

To put the case to the reader's experience I would say, that many a time has he, the reader, been refused a kiss he was fool enough to *ask* for, which he might have had for the taking!

The consequence was, that Mrs. Vyner kept within the programme of Platonic love; and this she managed without exasperating Marmaduke beyond endurance. An adroit woman has a thousand ways of preserving herself, and Mrs. Vyner was exceedingly adroit.

Meanwhile, she indulged in her passion without troubling herself much about consequences. She was content with keeping Marmaduke her slave. The delight that gave her is indescribable. She was always inventing some new plan to assure herself of it.

One day he was seated with her in the boudoir, which I have not yet described, but which, as the temple where she received her devotees, merits a few words. It was exquisitely fitted up. To throw the proper light upon her blonde beauty, the furniture was of

a pale blue; and the curtains which, in lieu of a door, separated the boudoir from the bedroom, were of blue velvet. The walls were painted: a light, elegant border of arabesque, and a centre piece of flowers on a light blue ground. A few statuettes, and some *recherché* knickknacks, were distributed with art about the room.

Dressed in a light peignoir, the deep rich lace trimmings of which only half concealed her dazzling bosom, she looked a most seductive syren in this retreat, and it is no wonder that Marmaduke's senses were captivated.

On that day, she was fretful. Never had he known her so exasperated against her husband, and against the wretched bondage in which she was held as wife to a man she could not love. To hear her talking about "incompatibilities," and the "degradation" of being linked to one man, while her heart was another's, you would have supposed she had been forced into the match, had been sold by some mercenary parent. From time to

time, she would throw up her eyes and sighing exclaim,—

“No escape! to think there is no escape!”

Marmaduke could not comprehend this. He understood clearly enough that she never had loved Vyner; but why these bitter complaints at this moment?

The truth is, she was about to make a great, a wanton experiment of her power over him; she wished to see how far his passion had made him her blind and willing instrument; and she suddenly interrupted an eloquent speech of his by,—

“Of what use is protestation? You say you love me. You say that you would move heaven and earth to gain me; yet you *do* nothing: it is all talk.”

“Do! What can I do?”

“Is it for *me* to tell you?” she said scornfully.

He looked at her wonderingly; but she had resumed her work and was silent.

“Abuse me for my stupidity,” he said;

“for upon my word, I do not understand you.”

She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

“Will you not tell me?” he asked.

She took a skein of silk and said,—

“Hold this, while I wind it.”

She fixed the skein on his hands, and began calmly winding, as if nothing whatever had been said. He waited a few moments expecting her to speak, but she gave no signs of intending to pursue the subject.

“Why will you not tell me what is in your thoughts at this moment?” he said.

“Contempt.”

“For what?”

“For mere talkers.”

“If you mean me, the contempt is undeserved. Tell me what it is that can be done, and it shall be done.”

She continued to wind the silk, but refused to answer.

“Mary, dear Mary, tell me what you mean.”

She kept her eyes bent down and said,—

“Can you not guess?”

“I cannot.”

She was again silent. The silk was all wound.

“What is it? For God’s sake, speak!”

“There is an obstacle to our happiness—is there not?”

“There is.”

“And but one?”

“But one.”

She raised her head a little, so as to look him full in the face, and then closing her eyes, in the way peculiar to her, suddenly flashed them upon him. In that instant he divined the diabolical thought which was in her mind, but which she did not dare to utter; he felt a sickening disgust steal over him, as this idea rushed hideously into his soul.

There was a breathless pause. He mastered his emotion as well as he could, and determined to have no possible uncertainty on the subject, but [to make her avow it in all its

explicitness. Collecting himself, therefore, he whispered,—

“*That obstacle must be removed.*”

A strange expression stole over her eyes, as she heard this, and said,—

“Have you the courage?”

He could scarcely falter out,—

“I have!”

Her point was gained. She no more meant her horrible suggestion to be realized, than he meant to realize it. They were both trying each other. She, to see the extent of her power; he, to ascertain the truth of his suspicions.

Imagining her power great enough to lead him into any crime, she burst out laughing.

“And do you mean to say you thought me serious, Marmaduke?”

“I did.”

“Then what a villain you must be!”

“I am only your slave.”

She shook her head at him, and said,—

“Slaves should not listen to such thoughts.

If I thought you were serious, I should loathe you."

"And I should loathe myself," he said, coldly.

It so happened that both believed the other guilty of the serious intention, and attributed the disavowal to fear of having been understood. Marmaduke had noticed the affected tone of her laughter; it was affected, but not from the cause he imagined: it arose from a sense of uneasiness at having pushed the experiment too far, and from a dread of his really believing her to be serious.

On the other hand, she noticed the faltering hesitation and coldness of his tone, which she interpreted into the uneasiness of guilt, but which really arose from the intense loathing he felt for her. It only seemed a confirmation of her power.

Nothing could ever have persuaded Marmaduke that Mrs. Vyner was innocent of the thoughts he attributed to her; and his loathing was so great, that it not only completely crushed

the sort of love he had felt for her, but revived his desire for vengeance, which he thought could not be made terrible enough to fitly punish such a wretch.

He dissembled his disgust, and only more urgently pleaded her to elope with him. At the conclusion of one of his speeches to that effect, he noticed that she seemed not to attend to him, but to be eagerly listening. Presently she put her finger upon her lips by way of caution, and then, in a voice she strove to make calm and distinct, said,—

“Marmaduke, I do not doubt your love, but I must not; will not listen to it. I am married. I never can forget that; do not you! If a sisterly regard will suffice you, that will I give; but you must here engage to think of me as a brother, and, above all, never again to let me hear from your lips the language I have heard to-day. Will you promise me?”

She nodded significantly to him to reply in the affirmative, and he said,—

“Will you, then, give me no hope?”

“None. You have heard my conditions. Do you accept them?”

“If I must.”

“You must.”

“Then I do.”

“That’s right. Now go home.”

She put her finger again upon her lips, and motioned him to listen.

The gentle creak of retiring footsteps stealing away was then distinctly heard. As they ceased, she said,—

“That was my husband. He has overheard us. But fortunately he heard nothing which I cannot explain. Leave him to me.”

Marmaduke went home in a state of fever, torn by the most vehement emotions, and seeing all darkly before him.

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER AND CHILD.

MEREDITH VYNER stole back to his study, after having overheard a portion of the foregoing scene, like one who has just received a sentence of death. He loved his wife with the unreasoning idolatry of one who has centred all his affections on a single object. His children had been gradually estranged from him, his wife had taken their place in his heart, and now she was listening to the vows of another!

What he had heard was enough to make him fear the worst. Her refusal to listen to Marmaduke, and her offer of a purely sisterly regard, although it assured him that at pre-

sent she was resolved not to forget her duty, gave him no assurance that such prudence would long continue. Could she restrict herself to that sisterly love? Could she know that one so young, so handsome, so imposing, loved her, and not at last yield to his love?

He would snatch her from the danger by taking her at once from London. Away from her lover, she might forget him, or he might seek another. It was necessary to take a decided step.

When Mrs. Vyner came into his study, he at once assumed an unusual tone of command, and informed her that it was his pleasure they should at once return to the country.

“My dear Meredith, what are you thinking of? The country! We cannot leave town in the height of the season.”

“I have my reasons,” he said, with as much dignity as he could assume.

“And I have mine for not going.”

“But I insist upon it.”

She seated herself in one of the easy chairs, and said, quietly,—

“ You will not insist when you have heard me. This very morning, Mr. Ashley has made a foolish declaration of love to me.”

He was thunderstruck. The quiet matter-of-fact style in which she communicated this intelligence, was indeed a masterpiece of adroitness. There are moments in our lives when audacity is prudence; and this was one, when nothing but an audacious avowal could, by anticipating, defeat the accusation she knew he would bring forward. She lost nothing by avowing it, as she was certain he already knew it; but, on the other hand, by anticipating him, she was enabled to give her own colouring to the appearances which condemned her.

“ I see your surprise,” she added; “ you little expected it, nor did I. You thought he was attached to Violet; I thought so too; and as I am sure Violet is attached to him, I have set my mind upon the match. But now, look

here: I received his declaration without anger and without encouragement. I told him I would love him as a sister, and made him promise, on pain of instantly refusing to see him, to cease all such language, and to crush all such hopes. Did I act rightly?"

"Yes—very—very."

"But, suppose I run away into the country, what will he imagine? That I am afraid of him, afraid of myself; that I love him, and avoid him. Do you wish him to think *that*? You do not. Then we remain."

"But . . . and you . . . will you continue to see him?"

"Why not? If I am to avoid him let it be done at once. If not, let us treat him as if he had never made that silly declaration. He will soon get over this. It is only a passing fancy. He saw me a mere girl, wedded to one old enough to be my father, and imagined, as all men would imagine, that I should be easily persuaded to forget what was due to my husband, and to myself. I have

undeceived him. My coldness and firmness will soon cure him. He will then think of Violet."

She ceased. He took vast pinches of snuff in an agitated absent manner, but made no remark. She perceived that she had gained the day, and left him to his reflections.

Bitter enough those reflections were. The explicit avowal had staggered him—had taken from him the very weapon he was to use; but it had in no way alleviated his jealous anguish. He could not answer her—yet could not satisfy himself. The reference she had made to his age still rung in his ears, and told him plainly that his rival would one day be happy.

That afternoon Violet and Rose returned. He received them with unwonted tenderness, for his heart ever yearned to those whom he had excluded from it, and he felt bitter remorse for having sacrificed them to his wife. Violet was peculiarly dear to him at this moment. He felt for her misplaced attachment, and remembered how ill she had been treated at

home. He folded her to his breast, with a lovingness which brought the tears into her eyes, and as she sat down on his knee, one arm around his neck, delighted with this change in his manner, she divined at once the real cause of the change. As it was Mrs. Vyner who had estranged him from her, so must it be Mrs. Vyner who had brought back his love.

It was a touching sight to see this parent and child united by a common sorrow, mutually pitying and mutually comforting each other, having in one embrace forgotten all that had once been distrust and coldness, and now possessed by that overflowing love which, in its exaggeration, desires to atone for past coldness.

It was not what they said ; for few words passed between them ; it was their eloquent looks, significant pressure of hands, convulsive embraces, and tones pregnant with meaning. The father mutely demanded forgiveness, and the child demanded a continuance of love.

After an hour of this intense emotion they grew calmer, and began to talk of indifferent things. From time to time they hovered about the name of Marmaduke, and betrayed, in their very recurrence to the subject, and hesitation in speaking openly of it, how predominant it was in their minds. At last they ventured on the name. It is impossible to convey an idea of the conversation which ensued, because it was conducted in phrases of the most guarded vagueness, but made full of meaning by the looks which accompanied them. Slowly, but irresistibly, the conviction came upon her, that her father had discovered his wife's guilty passion ; or, at least, *suspected* it. Her object, therefore, was, if possible, to persuade him that Marmaduke came there for herself ; and she even went so far as to laugh faintly at his efforts to make himself agreeable to Mrs. Vyner, by way of using a stepmother's influence in his favour.

Her voice shook, as she uttered this heroic falsehood.

He gazed at her with mournfulness; a tear rolled down his cheek ; his heart swelled as he sobbed out,—

“ My poor child ! my poor child ! ”

He dared not undeceive her, dared not tell her what he knew.

She saw that she was not believed, but little did she know the mournful pity with which her supposed credulity filled him.

It was a relief to her when the dinner-bell rang, and put an end to their interview.

He saw her depart, and sat sighing deeply, wholly bewildered at the inextricable difficulties of his position; and when Mrs. Vyner came in, and chatted away about the opera, to which they were going that night, as if nothing whatever had occurred, he almost felt as if he had just awakened from a dream-troubled sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CRISIS.

Quelle nouvelle a frappé mon oreille !
Quel feu mal étouffé dans mon cœur se réveille !
Quel coup de foudre ô ciel ! et quel funeste avis !

RACINE.—*Phèdre*.

False ! I defy you both :
I have endured you with an ear of fire ;
Your tongues have struck hot irons on my face.

CYRIL TOURNEUR.—*The Revenger's Tragedy*.

THERE was an appalling struggle in Marmaduke's breast that day as he reached home. The terrible scene which had passed between him and Mrs. Vyner, with its plainly expressed hint at assassination, made him shudder as he again and again went over it in memory. False and heartless he had known her ; but for *this* he had not been prepared. And he

felt a sort of sickness come over him as he reflected on the peril which he had escaped, in Vyner's not coming to listen at the very moment when she had proposed, and he had affected to accept the proposition! He would then have been accused of having really meant to perpetrate the crime; for who would have credited his disavowal? who would have credited his assurance that he was but feigning what his soul abhorred?

By a retrospective glance at his own conduct, and at the peril he had escaped, he was led to meditate on the nature of this woman; and by a reflection on her criminal thoughts, he was shown the criminality of his own.

This revenge which he had planned so remorselessly, what was it but a crime? If he had been wronged by a heartless woman, was it for him thus to measure out the punishment? and did her jilting him deserve so terrible a retribution?

After all, was not vengeance a "wild justice," but only the justice of savages? Was

it worthy of civilized, christianized man? And for a man to wreak it on a woman, was not that petty, ignoble, more like spite than retribution?

Such were the thoughts which possessed him. That they never suggested themselves before, arises from the fact of his never having before been cool enough to question the legitimacy of his feelings. But now they staggered him; now they came upon him like a remorse; and he *relinquished his scheme of vengeance!*

The next day, impelled by some strange impulse which he could not explain, he went to the Vyners. Violet observed the agitation of his manner, and attributed it to meeting her again, after what had evidently transpired during her absence. She was, therefore, considerably surprised when he begged for a few moments' private conversation with her, at the same time entreating Rose to leave them alone. She had intended to refuse the request, but Rose had departed before she could

open her lips. Rose too well understood the purport of that interview, not to be anxious to forward it by her absence.

“Mr. Ashley,” said Violet, coldly, “there is no subject upon which I can hear you alone; you will oblige me, therefore, by suffering me to follow my sister.”

“Violet!”

“Mr. Ashley, by whose authority do you address me in that manner?”

“The authority of my love. Violet, I love you . . . you know it . . . but I must tell you so . . . I must, . . .”

She moved towards the door; he intercepted her, and put his back against it. Drawing herself up to her full height, with a haughty gesture she motioned him to let her pass.

“I did not expect *this*,” he said, without moving; “I thought I should, at least, be heard. Miss Vyner had given me reason to hope that she would at least suffer me to tell her Violet, I cannot control myself. You *must* know, you must long have

known I loved you, you must have seen it in every”

“Mr. Ashley I request to be allowed to leave the room.”

“Do you refuse to listen to me?”

“I do.”

He stared at her bewildered; there was something so calm and collected in her manner, yet the manner was so incomprehensible, that he was speechless for a few moments.

“You cannot . . . cannot have mistaken . . . for so many months . . . do you mean that you mistook my looks . . . my words . . . my actions? . . . Did you?”

“I did not.”

“Good God! have you then been playing with me?”

“Playing!” she repeated scornfully, yet sadly. “I play!”

“Then what can all this mean? There is some delusion . . . a word may set it right. . . . You knew I loved you—did you not? You

hear it now. Violet, I love you—love you as man never loved before. Will you accept that love?”

“Dare you ask me?” she said, fixing her large eyes on his with searching keenness.

“Violet . . . what is it that you doubt?”

“Your purpose.”

“My purpose is, to tell you that my heart is yours. . . . That I live but in the hope of calling you mine.”

Her bosom heaved—her nostrils dilated, and with flashing eyes she proudly, almost fiercely, exclaimed,—

“Let me pass!”

“What is the meaning of this?”

“Let me pass, sir!”

“Violet! are you mad, or do you think me so? Is my love an insult, that”

“It is an insult — a deep insult. Now, sir, will you let me pass?”

“I *will* know what is at the bottom of all this. You may reject me, but you *shall*

explain. It is so utterly inconceivable that, after the encouragement you have given me, you should pretend to regard my avowal as an insult, that I demand an explanation."

In spite of the rising passion in his breast, he uttered this so collectedly and so earnestly, that Violet was somewhat perplexed, and began almost to doubt her own conclusions.

"Mr. Ashley," she said, "a short while ago, such an avowal could only have been felt by me as an honour; but since that, your own conscience will tell you why I reject, and reject with deep scorn, the offer of your hand. Pray let me say no more."

His conscience did tell him, at least it suggested what the cause most probably was; but wishing to come to an explanation, he said,—

"My conscience tells me that I love you—only you; will you tell me wherein lies the insult?"

A long struggle ensued in her mind; she

could not give him the explanation he demanded, because unable to bring herself to mention her stepmother.

“If you persist,” she said at last, “I must persist also. I tell you again, the offer of your love to me—here, in this house, is an outrage, and scorn is my only answer. Does that suffice? Would you have me add more bitterness to my refusal?”

“Violet, I cannot quit you without. . . . Tell me, is there not *that* in your mind which you shrink from uttering, and which has reference to *some one* in this house?”

“You understand me, then?”

“I do.”

“Then let me pass at once.”

“Not until you have heard me. Will you hear me. . . . Will you, in this solemn moment, let me lay before you the whole history of my heart? You think me a villain, will you listen before you condemn?”

“I know not what plausible excuses . . . ”

“Truth—the simplest truth shall be my

defence. If that condemns me, I will submit in patience. Will you hear me?"

There was something so solemn and so touching in his tone, that Violet was deeply affected by it; the sad earnestness of his voice pleaded eloquently in his favour.

He approached, and took her hand; she withdrew it hastily, and moved towards the mantelpiece, against which she leaned in an attitude of exquisite dignity, turning her face towards him, prepared to listen. After gazing stedfastly at her for a few seconds, while he collected his thoughts, he thus spoke,—

"Violet, I am about to make a most painful avowal; one that will startle you; one that will seem wholly inexplicable. When but a boy, I loved—loved as boys love, unreasoningly and ardently. I have tropical blood in my veins, Violet, and all passions become intense with me. The girl I loved returned my affection. We were to have been married. I was called away from England. I returned to my father in Brazil. My father gave his con-

sent to our marriage. I wrote to inform her of it: she was overjoyed. Her letters were as ardent as even I could wish. Suddenly they ceased. My father died. I was settling his affairs, and preparing to quit Brazil for England, when I learned from a newspaper that my affianced wife had married another."

He paused: a choking sensation in his throat impeded utterance. Violet had listened eagerly, and still kept her eyes fixed upon him.

"I cannot tell you," he resumed, "what I suffered on awakening from the sort of stupor in which this intelligence threw me. You have never known—may God preserve you from ever knowing it!—what that desolation is, when those we love are found unworthy of our love! The anguish and despair which then tore my soul to pieces, I shudder to look back upon. It was not that my love had been destroyed—it was not *that* which made the pang; it was the horrible, heartless cruelty with which I had been deceived. I had been

sacrificed to wealth. That I might have forgiven; but it was done so cruelly! Until she had accepted her husband, her letters were as affectionate and hopeful as ever. The blow was unbroken in its fall—no wonder that it nearly crushed me!”

He paused again; and saw tears glisten in the earnest eyes of his listener. She, too, had known what it was to suffer from hopeless love!

“Violet, I am fierce and brutal in my instincts, and my education had been but indifferent—on one point especially it had been deficient;—in the Christian spirit of forgiveness. Vengeance—the justice of the savage—was what I had never learned to disown. Writhing under the torture which had been inflicted, I took comfort solely in the hope of vengeance. I came to England with that one absorbing object. Now comes the painful part of my disclosure—if indeed you have not already guessed it—the girl who had . . . in a word, it was Mrs. Vyner!”

He expected to see her vehemently startled, but she only whispered, in a hoarse and broken voice,—

“ I knew it.”

“ You knew it ! Then have you understood me ? ”

“ Not quite.”

“ I must explain, then, my conduct further. I was here in England, resolved on reparation of the wrong I had suffered. I knew not what shape my vengeance would take, but I was resolved to have it in some shape or other. I saw you. To know you, was to love you—and I loved. In my love, I forgot my misery, and ceased to think of revenge. You were sometimes cold and haughty to me, Violet; sometimes kind and encouraging. Do you remember when we rode to the sands that afternoon, and sat upon the rock together listening to the sea? I could have told you then how much I loved you, had not your coldness chilled me. Well, on that very day, while I was suffering from your indifference ;

she, jealous of you, chose to recall me back again to my schemes, by pretending that her marriage had been an act of jealous despair; *she* roused the demon in me by her infernal arts, and once more I resolved to wreak upon her the vengeance you had made me forget. From that moment I have pursued a scheme which involved her ruin. Many times have I been vacillating, many times has a kind word or look from you brought me back again to a purer atmosphere; but *the devil would have it!* and a haughty gesture from you has thrown me back again. Hurried onwards by the irresistible course of events, I was nearly losing myself for ever, when last night I had my eyes opened. I saw that the only vengeance worthy of a man was *contempt*. At once, I resolved to cease feigning love for the miserable being whom I had marked as my victim; resolved to break away from the net in which I was entangled, by quitting England.

Before I left England, I had only to learn my

fate : if you refused me, I should carry my despair into distant lands ; if you accepted the offer of a heart, I thought you would not refuse to quit England with me. You have now heard all. I have told you of my crime : if repentance will not clear me from the stain. . . .”

The door was thrown violently open before he could conclude the sentence, and Mrs. Vyner stood before them.

They started as at an apparition.

Fearful indeed was the aspect of the little fury, as with bloodshot eyes, quivering lips, and spasm-contracted face, she trembled before them. All that was diabolical in her nature seemed roused, and looking from her eyes : passion made her hideous.

“ Your little history is incomplete,” she said in a hissing tone ; her voice lowered by the intensity of her feeling ; “ there is a chapter to be added, which you will allow me to add. Miss Vyner is so excellent a listener that she will not refuse to hear it.”

Violet looked haughtily down upon her, and said,—

“ I desire to hear no more.”

“ But you must hear this ; it concerns you. You cannot be indifferent to anything which relates to your honourable lover ; you cannot be unwilling to know that he who offers you his hand is vain fool enough to be the dupe of any woman, as he has been *mine*. He has told you, and how prettily he told it ! what pathos ! what romance ! he told you how I played with him. That is true. He was such a vain silly creature that no one could resist the temptation. Not only did I make a fool of him as a girl, I have done so as a married woman. I persuaded him that even respect for my husband, respect for the world could not withstand the all-conquering beauty of his lumpish person, and he believed it ! believed that his face was a charm no woman could resist. This besotted vanity brought him to my feet ; yes, even at the time you were sighing for him, he was at my

feet, ardent, submissive, a plaything for my caprice!"

She saw Violet writhing, and her savage heart exulted in the pain she was inflicting; she saw Marmaduke's calm contempt, and her exasperation deepened at the unavailingness of her sarcasms to wound him.

Turning from her, as from one unworthy of notice, he said to Violet,—

"I repeat, my fate is in your hands. I love you, love you as I never loved before—with my whole soul: love you with deep reverence for all that is so great and noble in you, and to that generous and exalted mind I leave my errors to be judged."

The sarcasm implied in this avowal almost maddened Mrs. Vyner.

"Accept him, Miss Vyner," she said with a short, hollow, and hysterical laugh; "pray put him out of his misery; accept the offering of his deep reverence, for that offering is *my leavings!*"

Marmaduke and Violet both started as this

poisoned sarcasm, issued from her lips, and their faces told her plainly she had struck deep.

“A reformed rake, you know, makes the best husband,” she pursued; “so that one so inflammable as *he* is, will be sure to make a constant and adoring husband. You will be so happy with him! Whenever conversation grows dull, he can amuse you with narrating little episodes of his love for me, and my *cruelty*: that will be so pleasant! you will never tire of that! Accept him: you will be sure never to repent it!”

Marmaduke could have strangled her.

Violet, seeing clearly the purpose of these horrible phrases, cut them short by saying,—

“Mr. Ashley, on some better occasion we will speak again of this; do not let the present ignoble scene continue.”

She held out her hand to him. He pressed it to his lips. Mrs. Vyner nearly shrieked with mad jealousy; but suppressed the explo-

sion of her agony ; while Violet swept out of the room, disdaining to give even a passing glance at her.

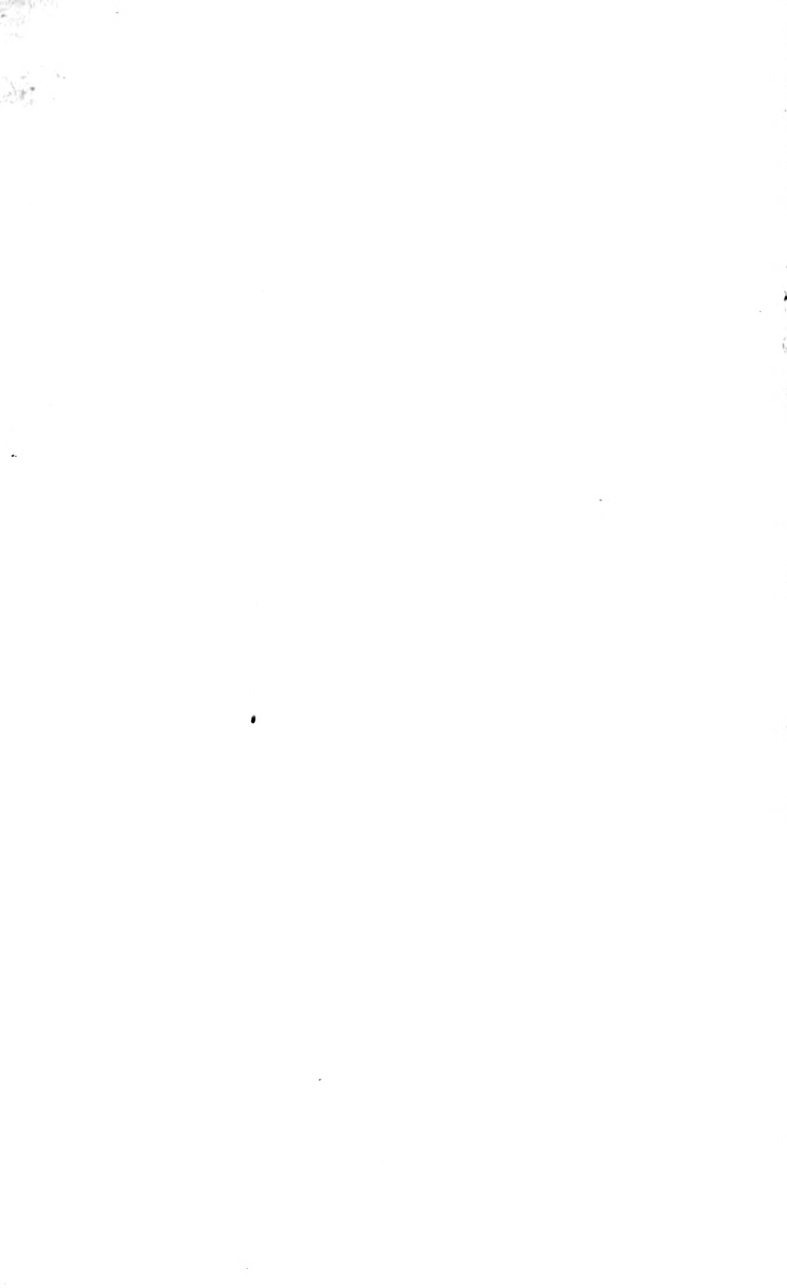
Mrs. Vyner sank exhausted into a chair. Her brain was as if on fire, and her whole frame shook violently with the unutterable rage, jealousy, and hate which stormed within her heart.

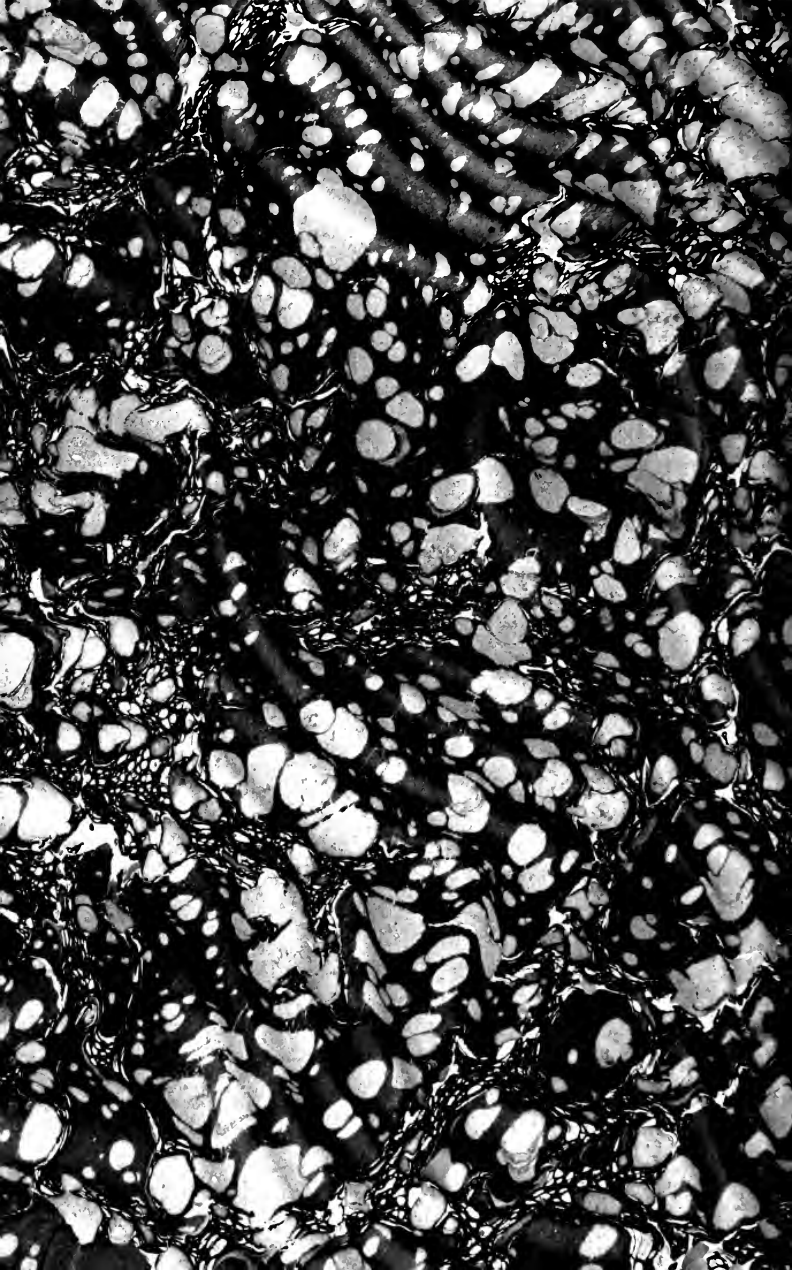
Marmaduke could not in his fiercest moments have desired a more terrible retribution than that which now had fallen on the miserable woman ; and he gazed upon her with a pity which astonished himself. To this he had brought her ; unwittingly it is true, but he felt it was he who had moved the stone which had fallen and crushed her ; and now that she lay there suffering before him, his anger had gone, and pity filled its place.

She expected him to speak ; she saw his fixed gaze and endeavoured to interpret it ; but he spoke not. Before she was aware of his intention, he had left the room.

Five minutes afterwards, Meredith Vyner found her apparently lifeless on the floor: she had swooned.

END OF VOL. II.







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